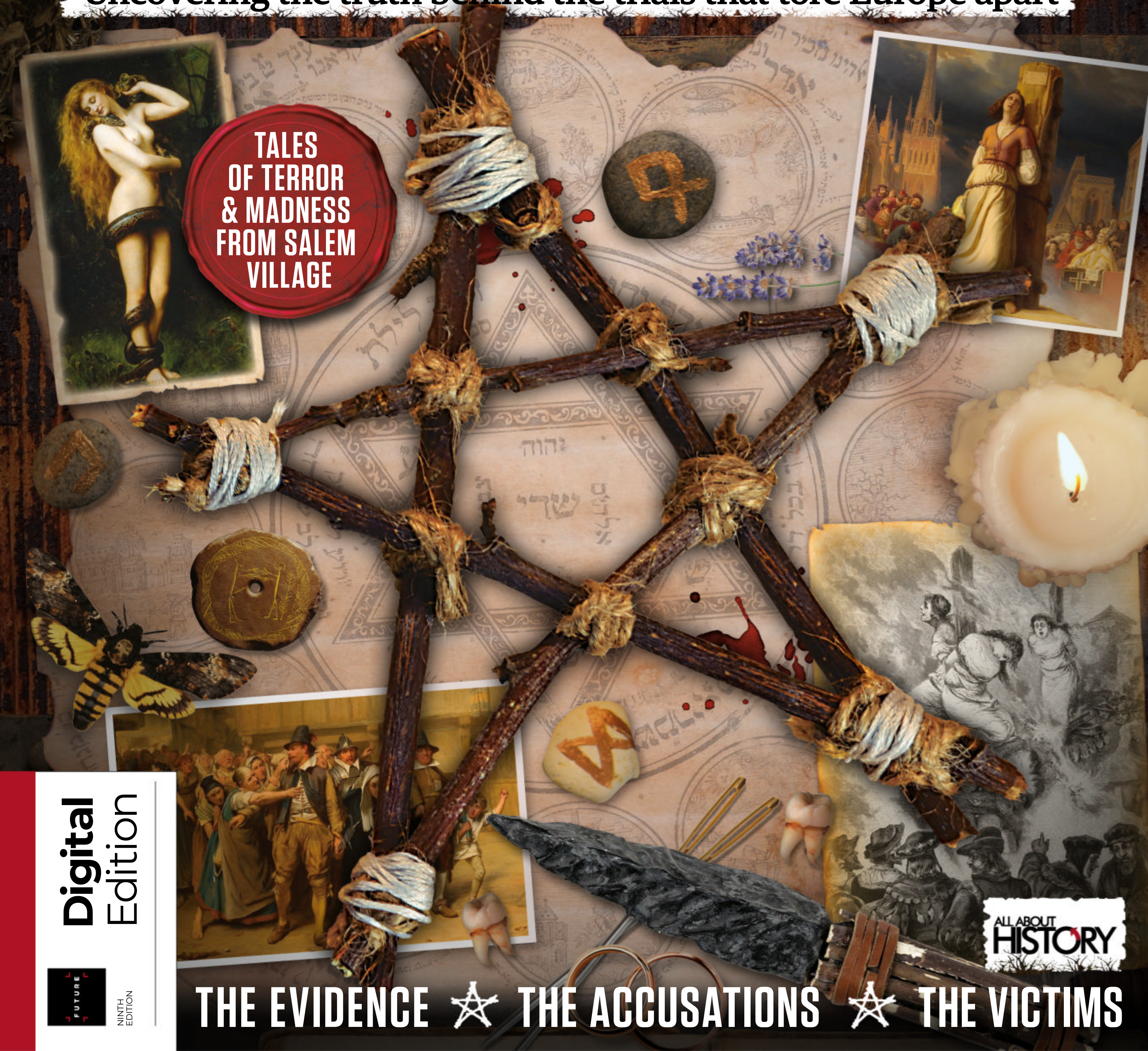
NEW

HISTORY of WITCHCRAFT

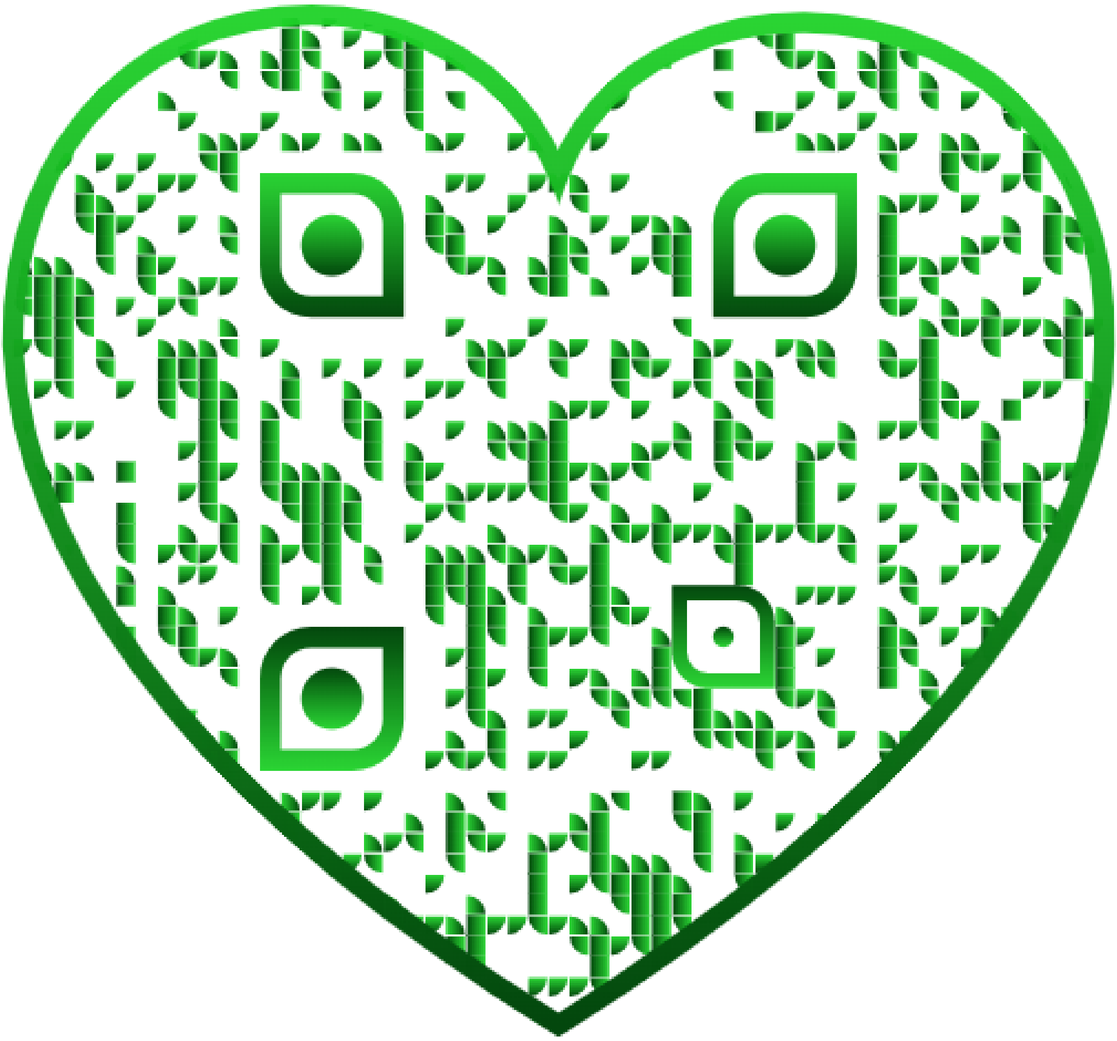
Uncovering the truth behind the trials that tore Europe apart



TALES OF TERROR & MADNESS FROM SALEM VILLAGE

THE EVIDENCE ✯ THE ACCUSATIONS ✯ THE VICTIMS

Digital Edition
NINTH EDITION
ALL ABOUT HISTORY



Welcome to

HISTORY of WITCHCRAFT

In a continent ravaged by plague, war and religious upheaval, maleficium (malicious magic) was just one more menace that people had to weather. No one was safe from maleficium, nor from accusations of practicing magic and consorting with the Devil - not even queens and courtiers.

In the History of Witchcraft, we cover everything you need to know about the hunts and trials that cut a bloody swathe across Europe and the American Colonies from the Medieval times to the Early Modern age. Uncover the true stories of the panic and paranoia that swept towns up into hysteria, from accusations at Pendle Hill in Lancashire, England, to the madness of the Salem Witch Trials leading to the execution of 20 people. Find out what tools, ingredients and magical tomes real cunning folk depended on and what concoction could cure stomach ulcers. Investigate the exploits of the notorious Matthew Hopkins, the self-styled Witchfinder General who made it his mission to punish anyone whom he believed to be practising the works of the Devil. Packed with incredible illustrations and insights, this is the perfect guide for anyone who wants to learn about this dark period of history.

HISTORY of WITCHCRAFT

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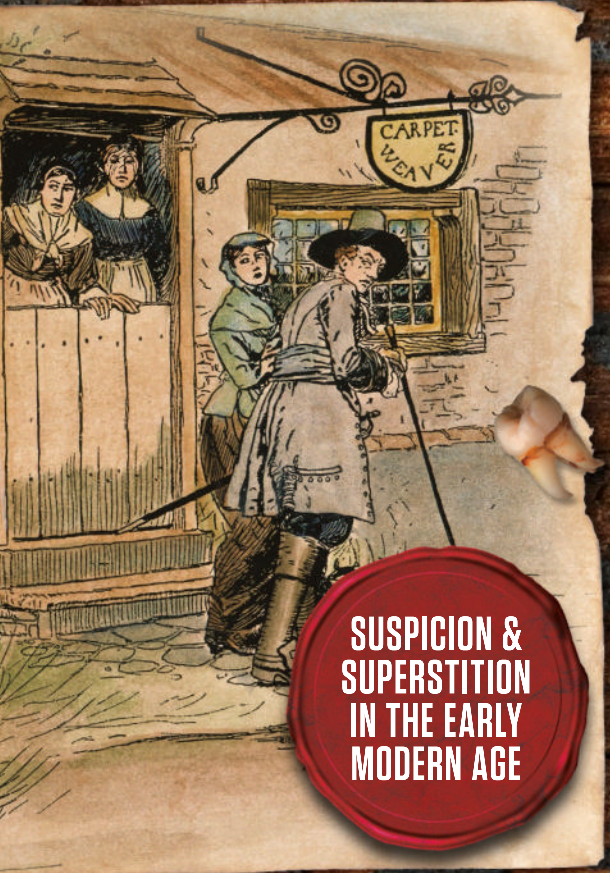

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WITCH HUNTING

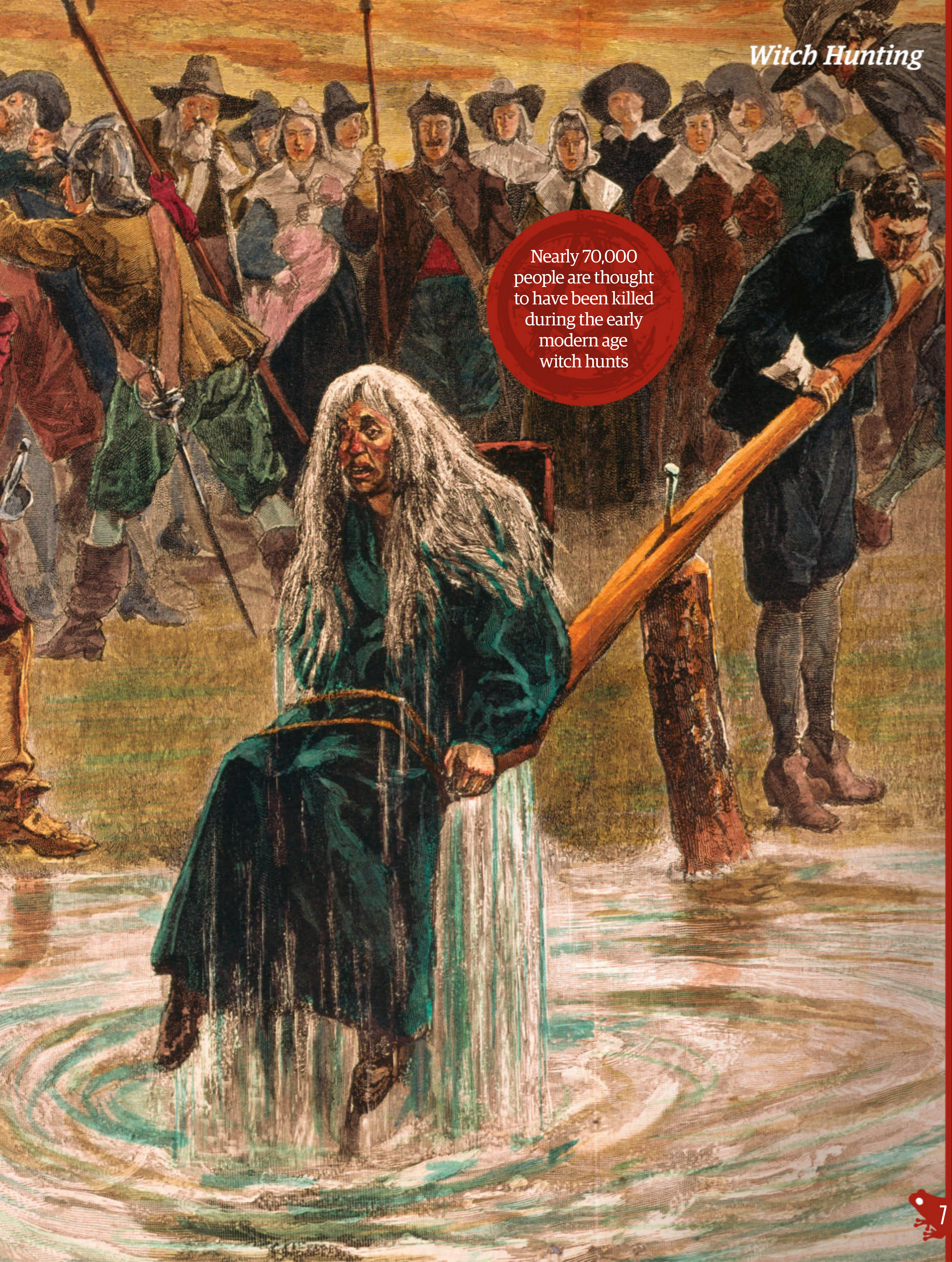
The witch-hunters of early modern Europe and America saw thousands tortured and sentenced to death, but what was a witch-hunt and why did this notorious practice happen?

Imagine for a few minutes you're a peasant in 17th-century Europe: a widow who lives in the small abode your husband left in his will. You tend a small plot of land on which you grow a number of root vegetables as well as a few herbs that have traditional medicinal properties. You're a God-fearing woman who attends church as regularly as your old bones allow and you believe in the devil even if you don't put much stock in the stories of witches who attend to Satan in the woods at night, smearing their backs with 'devil's ointment' and putting hexes on valuable livestock.

Recently you've seen people from your community being led away by the bishop's men to the courthouse, accused of paganism, if the village gossip is to be believed. You don't think you have anything to fear. That is, until armed men garbed in the bishop's colours turn up at your house one morning to take you away for questioning. You comply without so much as a word of verbal resistance; it's all a mistake, of course. This will soon be cleared up, you think, as you're taken through the village's main thoroughfare, past the houses of friends and neighbours who peer suspiciously at you from their houses. You feel embarrassed at first but then remember assuming that the miller's wife, who had been taken away in this manner too, was found guilty of witchcraft. That's when you start to feel afraid and begin fearing for your life.

The courthouse room is presided over by three judges with a clerk who takes the proceedings. Your name is added to the record before the accusations against you are laid out by the court: your neighbour, whom you've known for many years, has reported you to the church authorities for turning her cow's milk sour. She and her farmer husband have accused you of bringing the unseasonable wet weather that caused their harvest to fail and stirring carnal desires in their two maiden daughters, with love potions made from your herbs. You have no need for a lawyer or representation of any kind in this court, you're told, as witchcraft is deemed to be an exceptional crime in which God will defend the innocent.

Of course, you deny being a witch and all wrongdoing. It's absurd, you say, you've never seen eye to eye with your neighbours, who might just be mean enough to accuse you of witchcraft to get rid of you. Your denial is noted but the court considers witchcraft an extremely serious crime, so offers you clemency in return for a full confession. You stand firm and deny the charges, so are taken below to the cells for further questioning. Here, an appointed magistrate has you stripped and searched for magical charms concealed on your body. Your thumb is placed in a vice-like device and pressure applied as, once again, you're asked if you will confess to being a witch. You survive this first day of questioning without buckling under excruciating pain, only to fall foul of the torturer's



Nearly 70,000 people are thought to have been killed during the early modern age witch hunts

WITCH HUNTING WORLDWIDE

Scotland

1715

Kate Nevin had the unfortunate distinction of being the last witch to be executed in Scotland. She was hunted for three weeks before she was caught and burned to death.

New England

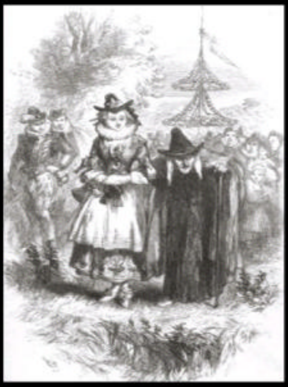
1662

Salem gets its due share of notoriety, although witch-hunting had been going on for decades. The Hartford witch trials went on for several years and proved an interesting case of the witch-court's rationale.

England

1612

The Pendle Hill witch trials, one of the most infamous witch-hunts in English history, saw ten people executed for murders as a part of their Satanic rituals.



Denmark

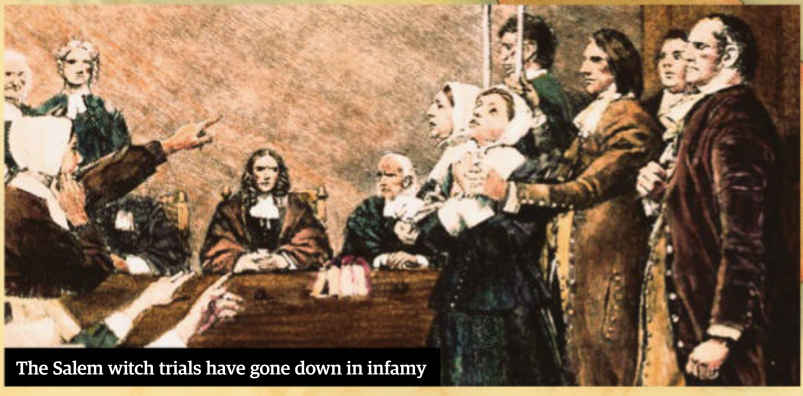
1590

The Protestant king James VI of Scotland (later to be king James I of England) was beset by bad weather when he made the crossing to meet his betrothed, Anne of Denmark. It was blamed on a coven, who were promptly tried and executed.

Zambia

1935

'Witchfinders' called the Bamucapi roamed the villages of the Bemba people, stirring up fear and putting those who fell under suspicion on trial.



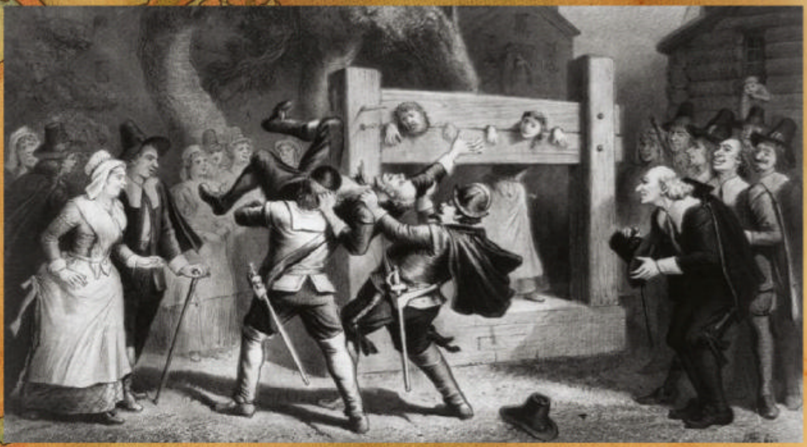
The Salem witch trials have gone down in infamy

rack. As the lever turns and your limbs splay, then pop, your eyes roll in agony – a sure sign that you seek Satan's aid. A confession is ultimately extricated and you're sent on a cart along with five other witches to a pyre the very next day, where you burn to death.

Witch-hunting didn't start in the Reformation period but it's here that history remembers it best: between the tectonic struggle of the mighty Catholic and Protestant churches, striving to purge their flock of heresy and prove unassailable piety over the rival faith, anyone from low-born to noble could be next in line to be crushed. Only those from the highest echelons of society were safe. So how did this seemingly insane state of affairs begin?

> "Pagan Roman law looked to witchcraft as a source of many of the civilisation's ills"

Much of what couldn't be explained by science in early recorded history was put down to 'magic', a means for ancient societies to understand, if not influence or control the world around them. Ancient Egyptians practised magic alongside more traditional medicine to promote health, protect themselves from evil spirits and communicate with their gods. The ancient Greeks used magic wands and symbols in all aspects of medicine and religion, while the Mesopotamians (what is now a large part of the Middle-East) recorded magical spells on clay tablets. Magic was generally indistinct from religion in many civilisations at this time, with the exception of Rome, where from 438 BCE onward practising magic, much like being a Christian, was made a crime punishable by death. Pagan Roman law looked to witchcraft as a source of many of the civilisation's ills, particularly epidemics and

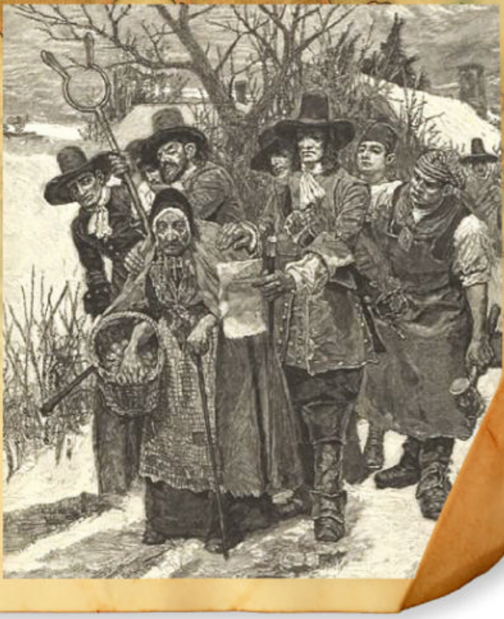


India

2011
Superstition and belief in witchcraft is still held in many parts of the developing world. In India, three people in their sixties were attacked and killed by a lynch mob for allegedly practising black magic.

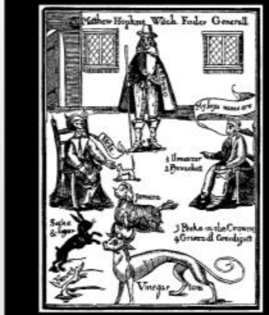
Saudi Arabia

Present day
Sorcery is treated with as draconian a punishment as blasphemy by the Saudi authorities. Those convicted of practising witchcraft (usually women) are invariably beheaded.



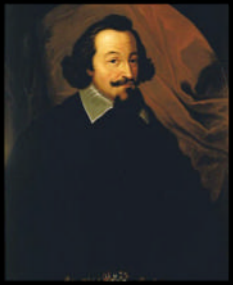
Who Were the Witch-Hunters?

The Witch-Finder General England



Matthew Hopkins, the self-titled 'Witch-Finder General', was an English witch-hunter who was active from 1644-1647, during which time he was responsible for the execution of 300 convicted witches. He introduced many witch tests that could be considered farcical if it weren't for their dire consequences. His work was sanctioned by Parliament, but he quickly gained a bad reputation for his methods. After his death, he became the bogeyman of his own vile story. His real legacy, however, was his book *The Discovery of Witches*, which gained traction in the colonies of late 17th-century America, especially in a community called Salem.

Prince-Bishop of Wurzburg Germany



With blue-bloods and the Pope behind him, Philipp Adolf von Ehrenberg was a powerful man in what is now southern Germany. A staunch anti-Protestant, his zeal for the eradication of witchcraft was matched only by his pursuit of the Catholic reclamation of Bavaria. With that in hand by the end of the 1620s, his focus turned to witches within his jurisdiction. No one was safe: his mass trials saw everyone from peasants to nobles dragged before the court and tried, if not convicted. In the eight years of his reign, over 900 people were burned at the stake, including devout priests, his own nephew and even children as young as three years old.

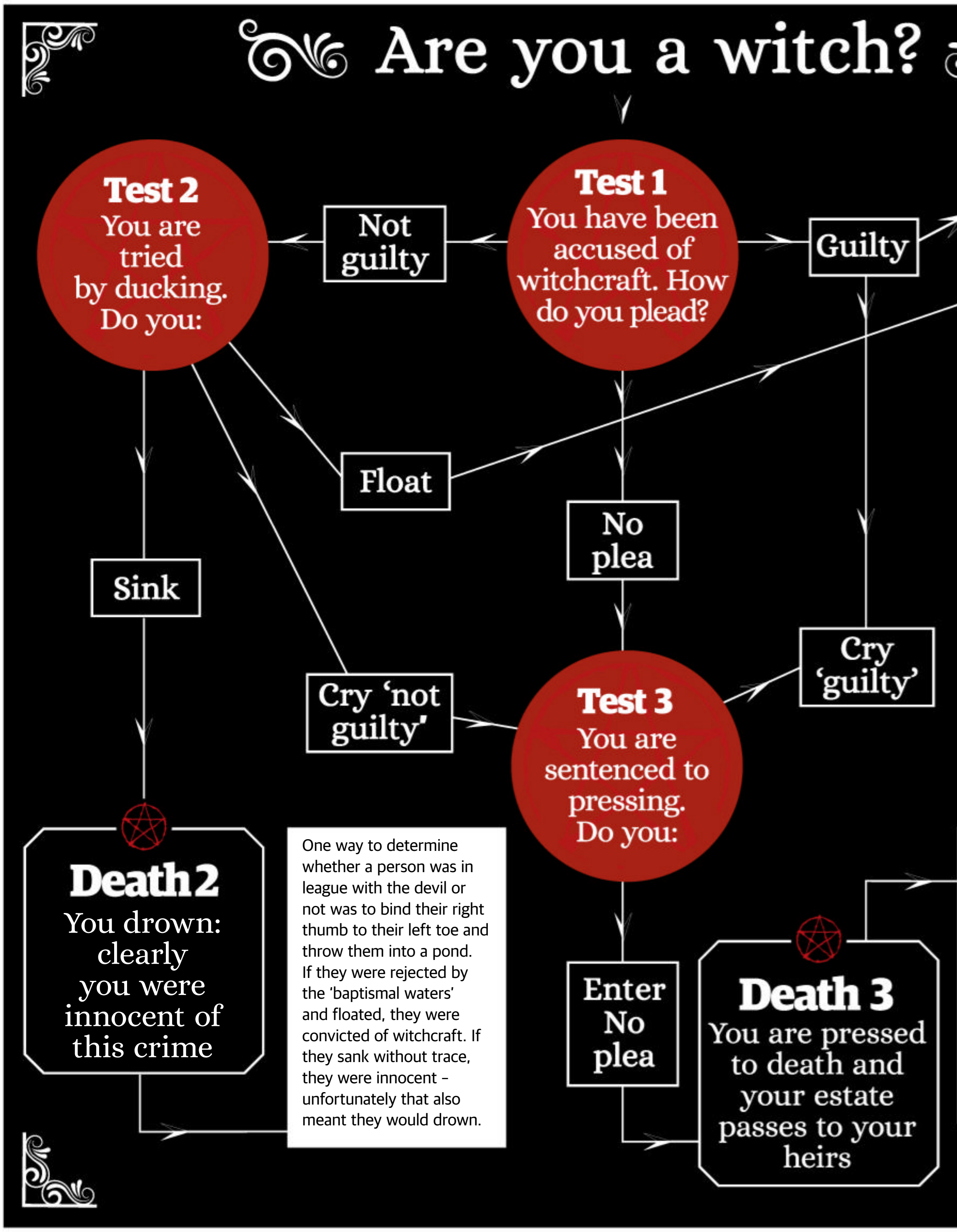
bad harvests. Over the course of several centuries thousands were executed.

In the centuries leading from antiquity to the witch-hunting boom, those in power considered witchcraft a silly superstition as frequently as a dangerous threat to society. The 8th-century Christian king of Italy, Charlemagne, scoffed at the belief in witchcraft and actually ordered the death penalty for those who pursued the burning of witches. Similarly, the 11th-century Danish court under King Harold considered the belief in witchcraft more dangerous than witchcraft itself and gave severe punishments to witch-hunters.

Through the Middle Ages, witchcraft was mostly tolerated or merely scoffed at and infrequently punished, often with a less punitive jail term or fine, depending on what the witch was accused of. This changed in the 12th century when the Roman Catholic Inquisition was formed, initially to tackle secular faiths that had split off from the church and threatened the power in Rome. The early 14th century saw the Inquisition expand its remit and occasionally deal with users of magic where a sect had adopted witchcraft as a part of its doctrine, such as the Cathars of France – whom Rome decried as a church of Satan.

By the late Middle Ages, it had become increasingly perilous to openly practise anything but the Catholic faith. Shortly following a Papal bill issued by Pope Innocent VIII in 1484 that explicitly condemned devil-worshipers who had slain infants, two inquisitors were authorised to investigate witchcraft in Germany. They were Jacob Sprenger and Heinrich Kramer, who were quick to yoke a new invention, the printing press, and publish what would become an infamous and influential tome on dealing with witchcraft and witches: the *Malleus Maleficarum – Hammer of Witches*. This treatise sought to reinforce the existence of witchcraft, educate officials in finding and prosecuting them and to lay the burden of its evils on women. It was widely read but within a few years the Catholic Church had distanced itself from this book, primarily because it had become popular with the secular faiths it sought to exterminate. But with

Are you a witch?



Test 1
You have been accused of witchcraft. How do you plead?

Guilty

Death 1
You are burned at the stake for the crime of being a witch

Not guilty

Test 2
You are tried by ducking. Do you:

Sink

Death 2
You drown: clearly you were innocent of this crime

Float

Cry 'not guilty'

No plea

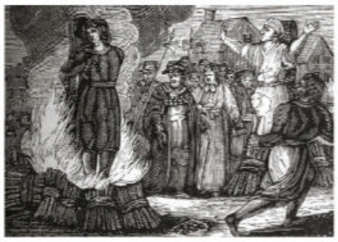
Test 3
You are sentenced to pressing. Do you:

Cry 'guilty'

Enter No plea

Death 3
You are pressed to death and your estate passes to your heirs

There were many ways someone found guilty of witchcraft could be executed: hanging and beheading were common and drowning was merciful compared to being burned to death. This was a method employed by the zealous Prince-Bishops of Bavaria, who believed that fire was the only way to purge the evil of witchcraft from the land.



One way to determine whether a person was in league with the devil or not was to bind their right thumb to their left toe and throw them into a pond. If they were rejected by the 'baptismal waters' and floated, they were convicted of witchcraft. If they sank without trace, they were innocent – unfortunately that also meant they would drown.

Common law in 17th-century Britain and its colonies meant the defendant could only be tried if they submitted themselves to a trial – if they entered a plea. To coerce a plea out of the accused, they would be stripped naked and a plank placed on their chest, before rocks and other heavy weights were piled onto it. There was a genuine incentive for defendants to 'stand mute': the Crown was unable to forfeit the property if they weren't found guilty.

the dawn of Protestant Reformation, the book and its ilk became the linchpin for the witch-hunting boom, as the Protestant Church endorsed these tomes precisely because they were outlawed by Rome and the Vatican.

As the creation of Protestant churches swept across Europe, witch-hunting took place in earnest, encouraged by many royal houses like Denmark and Scotland. Fuelled by religious persecution, the hysteria among the people came in waves marked by a spike in executions. A witch could be accused of causing disease, death, disaster (natural or otherwise), for living in a remote location, being thought strange or foreign or simply being in the wrong place and time. The motives of the accuser could be equally arbitrary, from genuine belief that a witch brought some misfortune upon the community, to even more sinister motives, such as a means of social control by the authorities or to confiscate the property of the accused. In the witch-hunting boom in Scotland that lasted up until the 18th century, those practising witchcraft went from being thought superstitious crackpots to dangerous devil-worshippers: they had sold their souls to Satan and held anti-Christian services called a witches' Sabbath. Witchcraft was legislated against in 1563 and over the course of the next 150 years or so, the 'witch-prickers' went about their business of pricking the body of a person accused of witchcraft: if they didn't bleed, it was viable evidence for the court to try them.

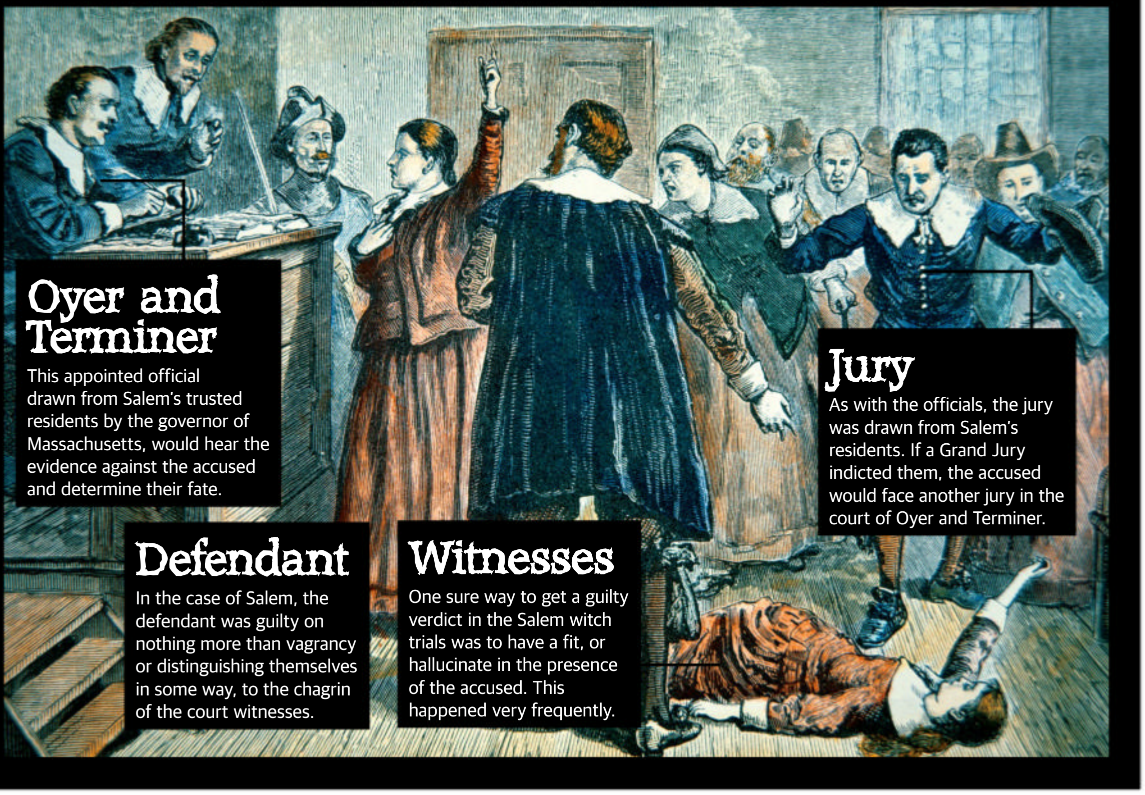
Torture was a common means of extracting information from those who weren't immediately cleared by the courts. Although the height of the witch trial era was marked by general disregard for real evidence and irrational hysteria, torture wasn't

The Salem Witch Trials

Possibly the most infamous witch-hunt in history took place over the course of a few months in the Puritan community of Salem, New England in 1692. After a doctor had come to the conclusion that the daughter and niece of reverend Samuel Parris were suffering from a witch's spell, the village of Salem descended into an ever-increasing spiral of accusations.

This was spurred on by the anecdotal support of the two young girls and other, similarly afflicted residents, who went on to implicate over 150 people, mostly women but also men and one child. The trials themselves were an utter sham: convictions were mostly based on the fits and hallucinations of witnesses, apparently caused by the accused's presence.

Of the 150 accused, 14 women and four men were sent to the gallows while one particularly stoic man, Giles Corey, endured 'pressing' – which involved piling rocks on his chest – rather than entering a plea of any kind. After two days he expired, but remained resolute until his death. After five months of madness, the governor of Massachusetts dissolved Salem's witch-court and replaced it with one based on reliable testimonials, which resulted in the release of all awaiting trial.



Oyer and Terminer

This appointed official drawn from Salem's trusted residents by the governor of Massachusetts, would hear the evidence against the accused and determine their fate.

Jury

As with the officials, the jury was drawn from Salem's residents. If a Grand Jury indicted them, the accused would face another jury in the court of Oyer and Terminer.

Defendant

In the case of Salem, the defendant was guilty on nothing more than vagrancy or distinguishing themselves in some way, to the chagrin of the court witnesses.

Witnesses

One sure way to get a guilty verdict in the Salem witch trials was to have a fit, or hallucinate in the presence of the accused. This happened very frequently.

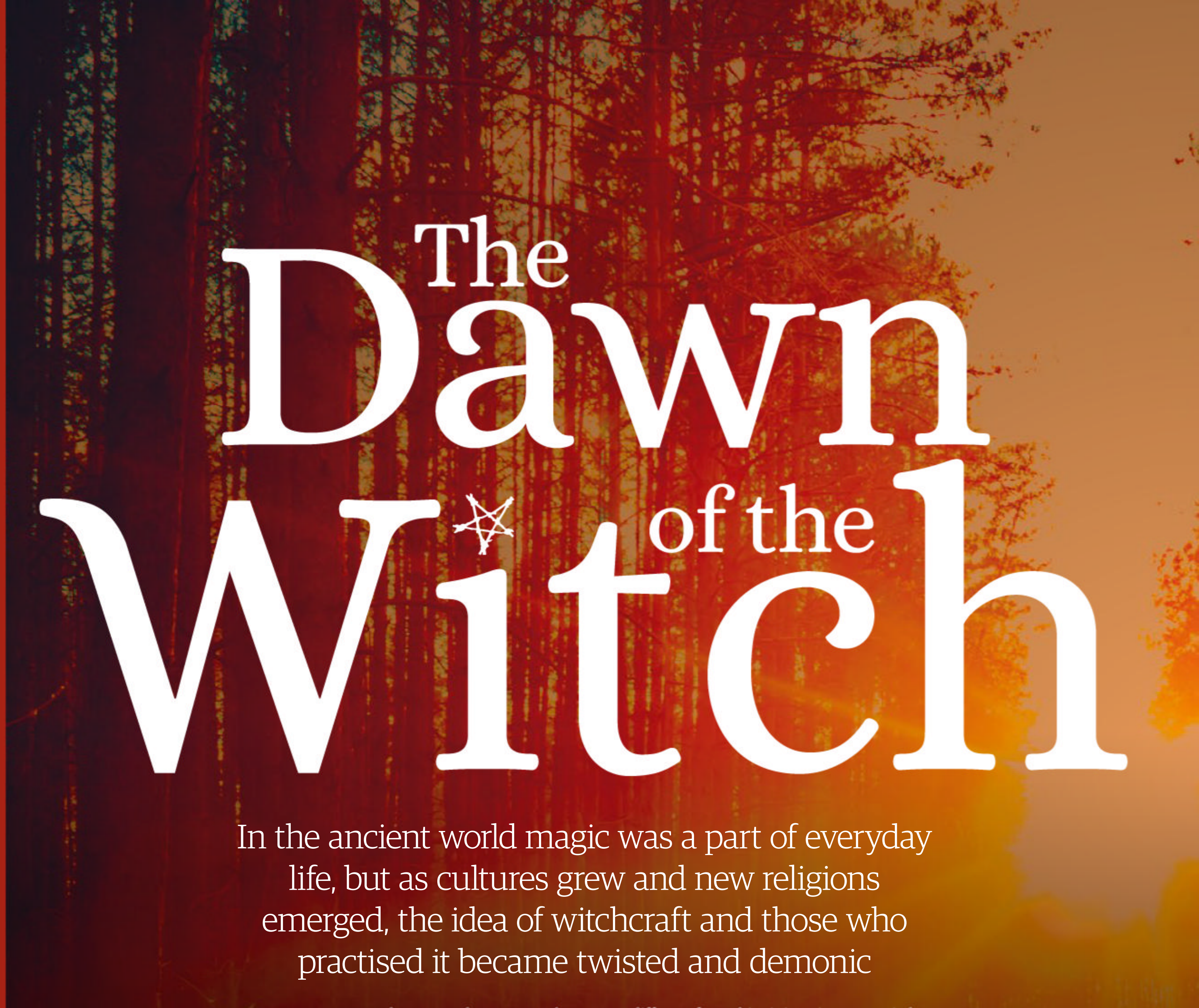
> "Torture was a common means of extracting information from those who weren't immediately cleared"

a completely arbitrary practice and there was a certain method to be followed: generally speaking, the torture came in several degrees of increasing intensity and brutality, observed and recorded by a clerk. The idea was to extract a confession and have the accused repeat the confession outside of the torture: the accused was presumed guilty and often, even those convinced of their innocence would admit to anything after the prolonged agony of cruel and unusual punishments – it was a rare occasion for torture leading to an acquittal.

England brought in serious penalties for witches under the Witchcraft Act of 1542, amended in 1562 and 1604 to repeal certain statutes, such as the 'benefit of clergy', which spared anyone who could read a passage from the Bible. One of the most famous witch trials in England were of the Pendle witches in 1612, which saw ten people, mostly women, sent to the gallows. King James I was driven by Protestant theology and was particularly interested in witchcraft and its eradication. Thus, those who refused to attend the Church of England to partake in holy communion, such as the devout Catholics of the Pendle Hill region in Lancashire, immediately popped up on the radar of local Justice of the Peace, Roger Nowell. Further probing by Nowell revealed that several of these local non-conformists already considered them witches of a kind, providing healing and potions for the community – a common trade in the 17th century. After summoning three members of the Device family, Nowell was told that the Chattox family – who competed for their trade in the potion and charm business – had murdered four men from the area. The Chattoxes were summoned and accusations and counter-accusations flew throughout the community, resulting in ten people being hanged for their crimes.

Similar stories played out in the rest of Europe and the North-American colonies. German heiress Merga Bien, heavily pregnant at the time, was convicted of murdering her husband by witchcraft and that her unborn child had been fathered by the devil. She was burned at the stake. Anna Kolding was one of several people who bore the brunt of a Danish minister looking to shift blame for under-supplying the royal ships on a journey across the North Sea. She was accused of summoning storms, found guilty and was burned at the stake.

In the 18th century, a much more rational and scientific age finally arrived. Pioneering astronomers and scientists like Galileo and Newton had laid the groundwork for an empirical generation who sought to verify the nature of the world by observation rather than superstition. A dim view was now taken of those who still believed in witchcraft and persecuted 'witches', and this brought with it a far less punitive culture. During the reign of George II, the Witchcraft Act of 1735 made it explicitly illegal for anyone in Britain to claim that they or anyone else had magical powers and were a witch. Other countries quickly followed suit, finally signalling the end of two centuries of madness. Although nearly 70,000 people are thought to have been executed during the brutal witch-hunts of the Early Modern age, only around 12,000 of these executions have been officially recorded.



The Dawn of the Witch

In the ancient world magic was a part of everyday life, but as cultures grew and new religions emerged, the idea of witchcraft and those who practised it became twisted and demonic

Nearly every culture across the modern world recognises the concept of a witch. Though variations occur, more often than not the witch represents something dark and sinister; something to be feared. Compared to the innocent maiden, clothed in white, the witch is old, ugly, bent double before a cauldron as she brews trouble and strife for unsuspecting victims. The witch is the dark side of femininity, an unhinged, evil presence with great power at her disposal. The witch is a woman who cannot be controlled.

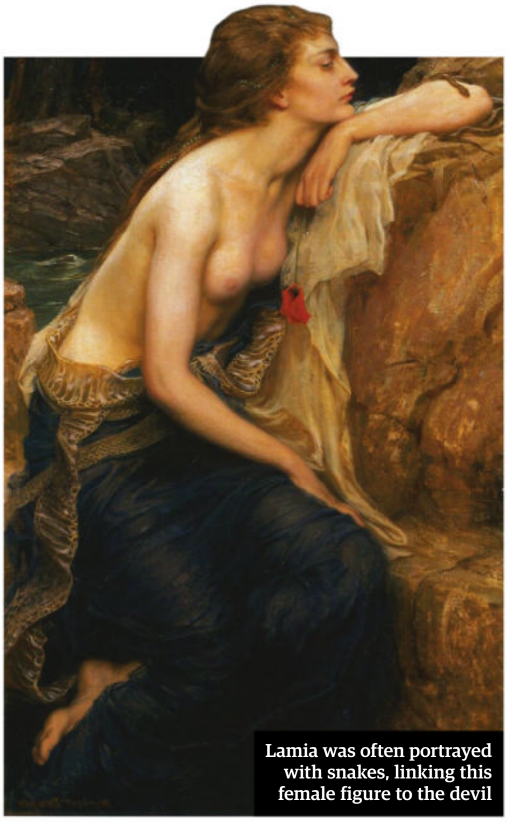
This image has not always been common: it is one, like the witch's potion itself, that has been brewed and tempered over years of mythology, religion and persecution. The earliest versions of witches couldn't be more different from this sinister image – witches were healers and bastions of society. In early Middle Eastern societies, for example, female deities were worshipped, and the holiest of rituals surrounding them were performed by women trained for that purpose. These early examples of witches were known as wise women and were seen as crucial to society. They would stand beside kings, armies would come to them for sacred rituals, and expectant mothers relied on them to deliver babies. But how did this figure, so adored and revered in early society, transform into the spectre of evil and misdeeds that we recognise today?

> The idea witches had the ability to turn men into animals was elaborated on by writers, fuelling the witch hunt craze

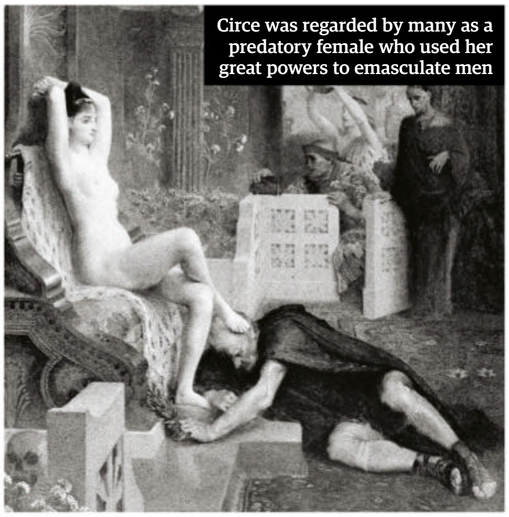
There are many different arguments as to how this transformation took place. One explanation claims that when the Indo-Europeans expanded westward their male-dominated culture, which

Early Christians were occasionally accused of practising black magic in ancient Rome

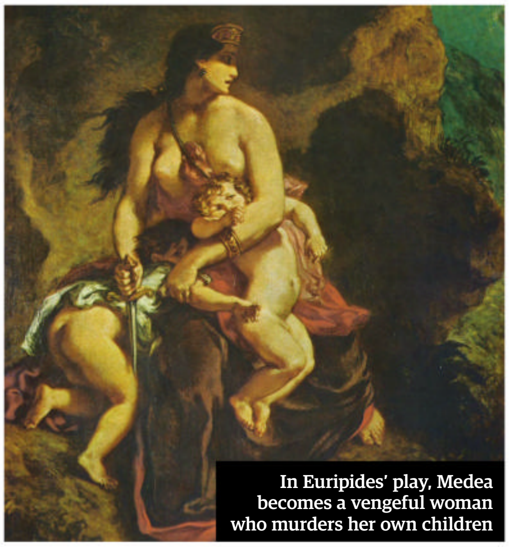
In some versions of the garden of Eden story, the tempting serpent is portrayed as a woman



Lamia was often portrayed with snakes, linking this female figure to the devil



Circe was regarded by many as a predatory female who used her great powers to emasculate men



In Euripides' play, Medea becomes a vengeful woman who murders her own children

focused on the power of warriors, war and fierce male gods, overtook the gentler, passive female deities that had previously ruled. Although our actual knowledge of the Indo-Europeans is not extensive, there is evidence that the perception of magic, and the females who practised it, changed upon the development of male-dominated societies and religions.

The most concrete way to look at how witches came to be regarded is by examining figures of myth. These mystical women able to conduct magic became a common archetype in many myths of the ancient world. A prime example of this dangerous 'bewitching' woman is Lilith. A figure from Jewish mythology, Lilith was a promiscuous demon of the night who kidnaps children. Lilith was also portrayed as leading Adam astray and leaving the garden of Eden after she refuses to be subservient to him. Lilith was a figure to be feared, a woman with powers who used them to torment. These stories fuelled the male-centric religion, and in the teachings witchcraft was seen as dangerous and outlawed as a Pagan practice. For the Jewish people encountering societies that worshipped female Gods, it was a way to establish their own religious dominance.

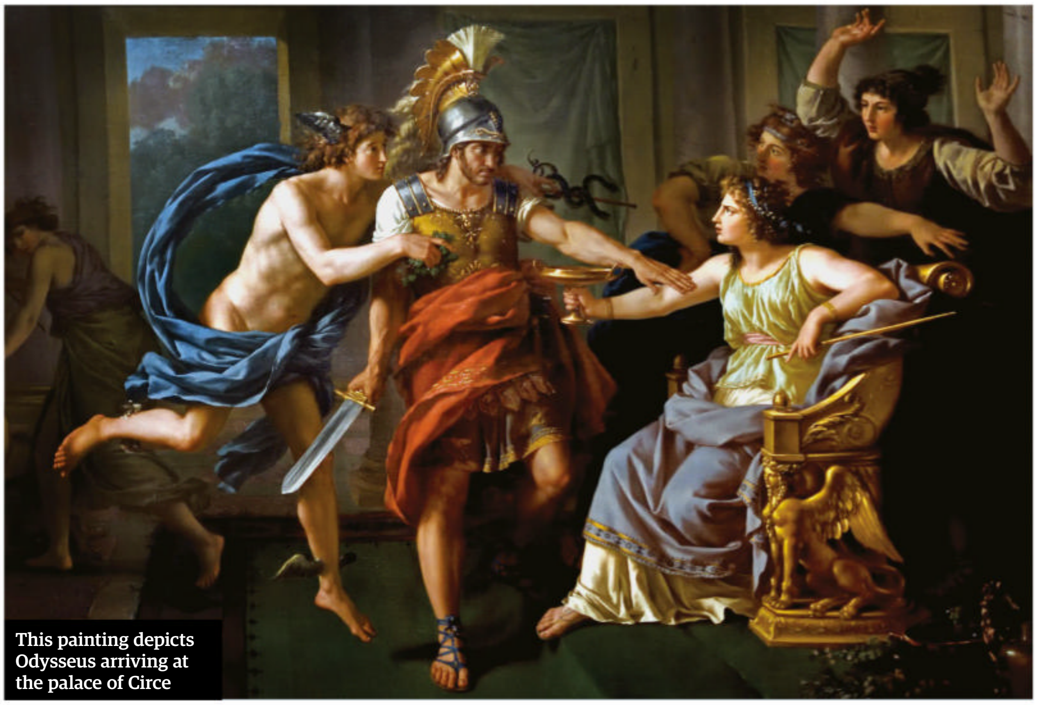
Greek mythology also features many female figures who practise magic, but their portrayal is not quite as damning as that of Lilith. Medea, an ancient Greek figure, was a sorceress who helped Jason during his quests, providing him with spells, potions and magic. Traditionally, in the story Medea ends up happily married to Jason and the two have children together. Medea's role is that of the helper; the provider of magic for the male hero. In this myth, magic is a positive thing; it helps Jason to succeed, and the woman providing it knows her place. It is her duty to help the hero and then marry and have babies with him.

The witch of Endor, who appears in the Bible and summons the dead, has caused much debate among theologians

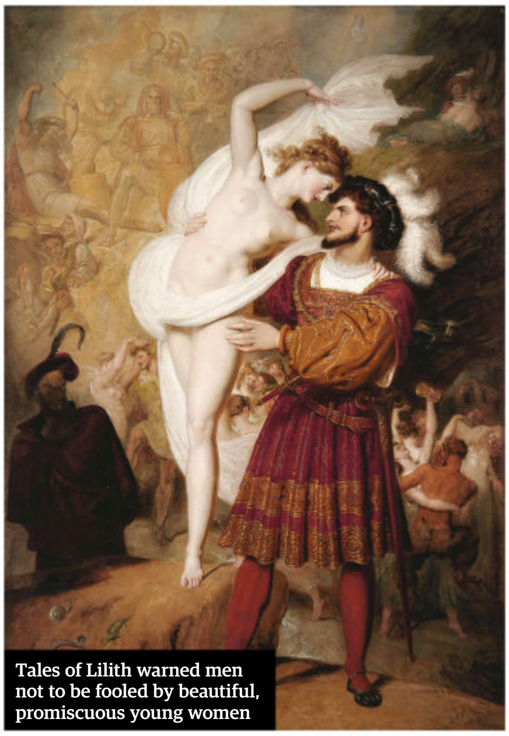
We can see how the Greeks viewed witches differently in the story of Circe. In the *Odyssey*, Circe is portrayed as a dangerous woman who transforms Odysseus' men into pigs. She uses potions, casts magic with a wand and even makes herself invisible. Odysseus uses a magic root given to him by the male god Hermes to defeat her. In the end, the rebellious Circe swears an oath to not use any more magic against the hero, then ends up feeding his entire crew and sleeping with him. The outcome is a happy one: the powerful woman who tried to trick and fool men finally accepts her 'rightful' place as a lover and homemaker.

More damning portrayals of magical women who did not rein in their murderous impulses can also be found in Greek mythology. Lamia began as a beautiful queen who turned into a terrifying

"Mystical women able to conduct magic became common in myths"

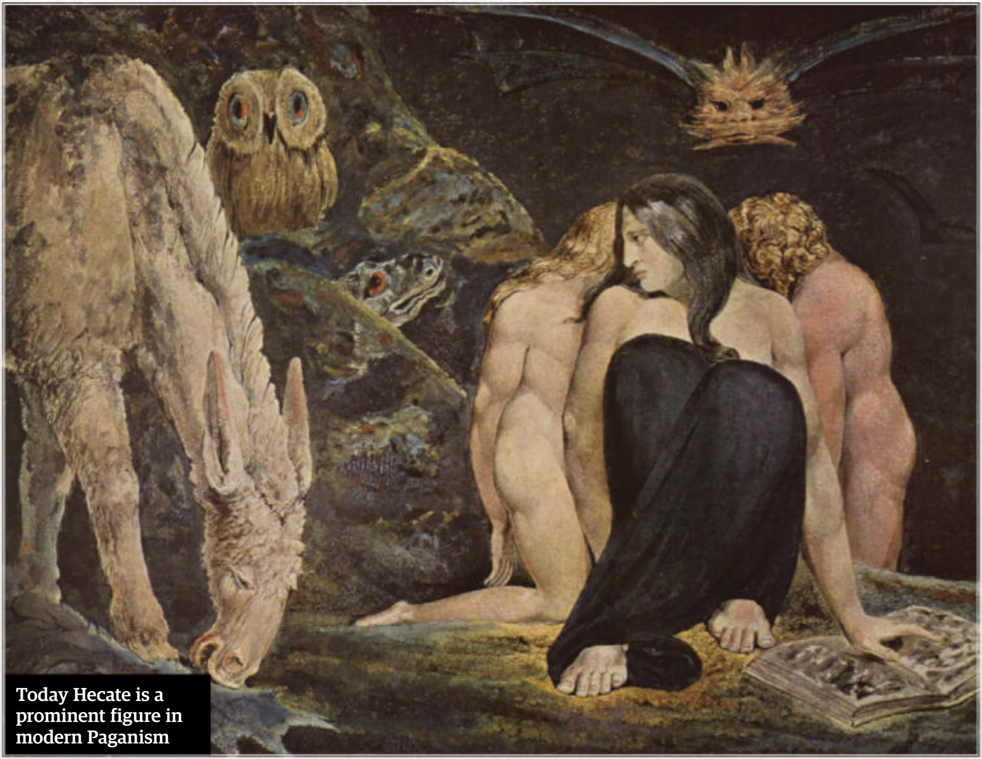


This painting depicts Odysseus arriving at the palace of Circe


Tales of Lilith warned men not to be fooled by beautiful, promiscuous young women

Hecate: Goddess of Witches

In early Greek mythology Hecate was the goddess of the wilderness and childbirth, but her role developed over time into goddess of sorcery and even queen of ghosts. Hecate is commonly depicted as having three heads to indicate the duplicity of her character – moon, earth, underworld and maiden, mother, crone. It was believed that as a goddess of sorcery she could keep out evil spirits, so images of her were placed in doorways and city gates. But this developed the misconception that she could also let evil spirits in if displeased. This led to the belief that she guarded the borders between our world and the spirit world and Christian perceptions of this powerful witch became altogether more negative. Her association with female dogs and snakes, as well as her ability to transform into a black dog, helped to demonise her further, and fed the notion that witches could transform at will. By the 15th century it was believed that Hecate was revered by witches and her role as goddess of all witches became so ingrained in society that Shakespeare references her in *Macbeth*, as the titular character utters "Witchcraft celebrates pale Hecate's offerings."


Today Hecate is a prominent figure in modern Paganism

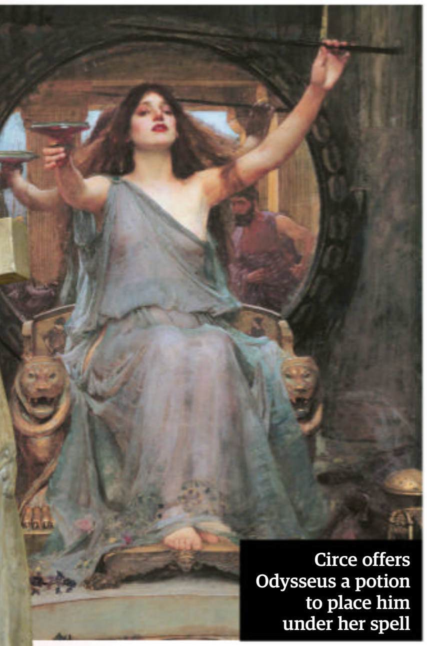
being who devours the children of others. This unhinged, demonic woman is portrayed in some versions as possessing a serpent's tail below the waist. Lamia became a figure of great fear, one that mothers would use to threaten their children with to encourage good behaviour. It is easy to see how tales of this frightening, demonic woman could have seeped into society and altered the perception of magic and what the women who practised it were capable of.

The Greeks themselves were not against magic. In fact, they had their own form of religious magic surrounding rituals to invoke the power of gods. What they were against, however, were women who did not know their place. There were examples of women receiving the death sentence for distributing bewitching drugs and uttering incantations. The Greeks thoroughly believed in the power of magic, and there were many who were so afraid of it that they campaigned to eradicate magic from society entirely. State-controlled magic, such as rituals for the gods, was seen as acceptable, but magic in the hands of the lower classes, especially poor women, was regarded as dangerous, and those who practised it were seen as being at odds with common society.

As Roman culture was heavily influenced by Greek myth, these common perceptions of demonic beings and the good, obedient, motherly witch still held great influence. The Romans also openly acknowledged the use of magic. In fact, it became part of the society's state religion, and many believed the use of it was reason for the empire's success. This religion was controlled by the upper classes and was directly connected to Roman law. When the empire encountered new religions or cults claiming to also possess magical powers this was seen as sacrilegious and most certainly dangerous to the balance of patriarchal power in Rome. Women may have been unable to defeat men physically, but magic and religion were subtler ways of rebelling,

> Lamia was also said to be have been able to remove her eyes, which gave her the gift of prophecy

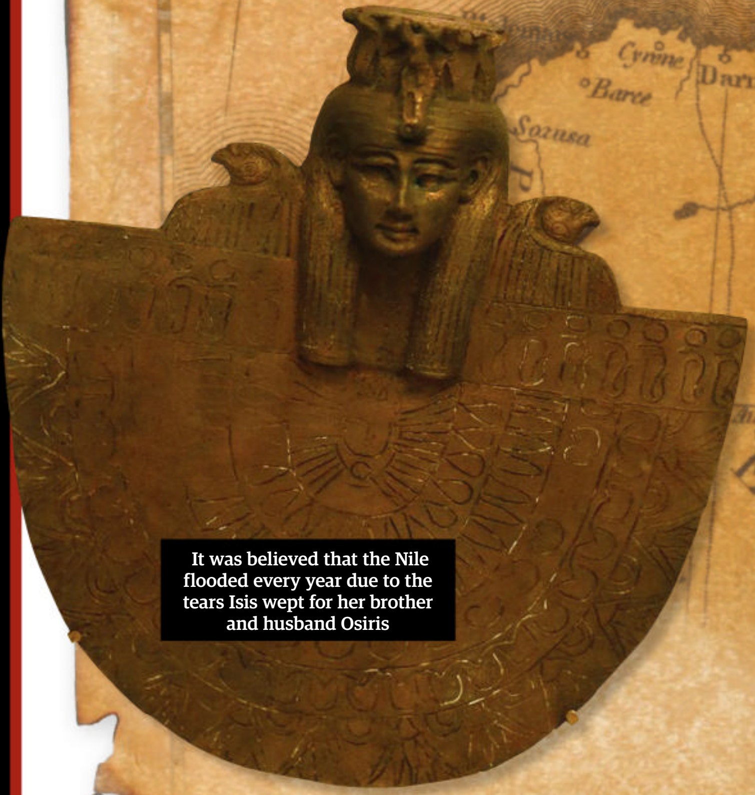
In some Egyptian -inspired Greek writing, Hecate is said to have the head of a dog, serpent and horse


Circe offers Odysseus a potion to place him under her spell

© Corbis; Alamy

MAGIC IN THE ANCIENT WORLD

Magic has been present since the earliest human cultures



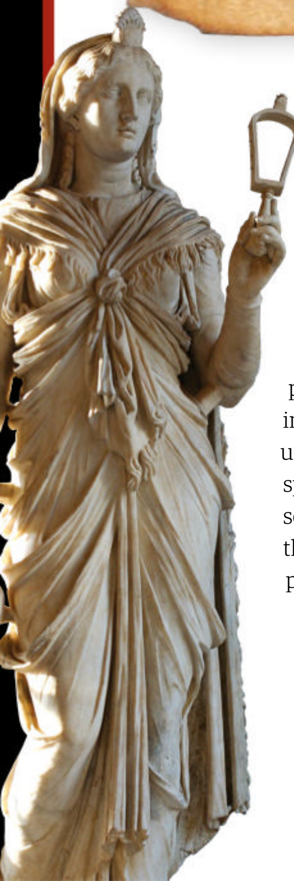
It was believed that the Nile flooded every year due to the tears Isis wept for her brother and husband Osiris

Israel

Although magic was officially condemned in the ancient Jewish world, there are many examples of what we would consider 'magic' today used in ancient Hebrew cultures. Magical recipes and spells have been found, and there were instances of exorcisms of demons, a wide array of amulets, incantation bowls and also medical magic used. Although some Jewish leadership condemned this, most didn't condemn it at all, and others even adopted it themselves.

Egypt

From conception to death, belief in magic underpinned all aspects of life in ancient Egypt. Amulets, rituals and magic images were used in everyday life, and magician priests invoked the power of the god of magic, Heka, to greater ends. Magic and medicine went hand in hand, with a medical practitioner working alongside a magical one, and Gods were summoned to deal with diseases deemed 'supernatural'.



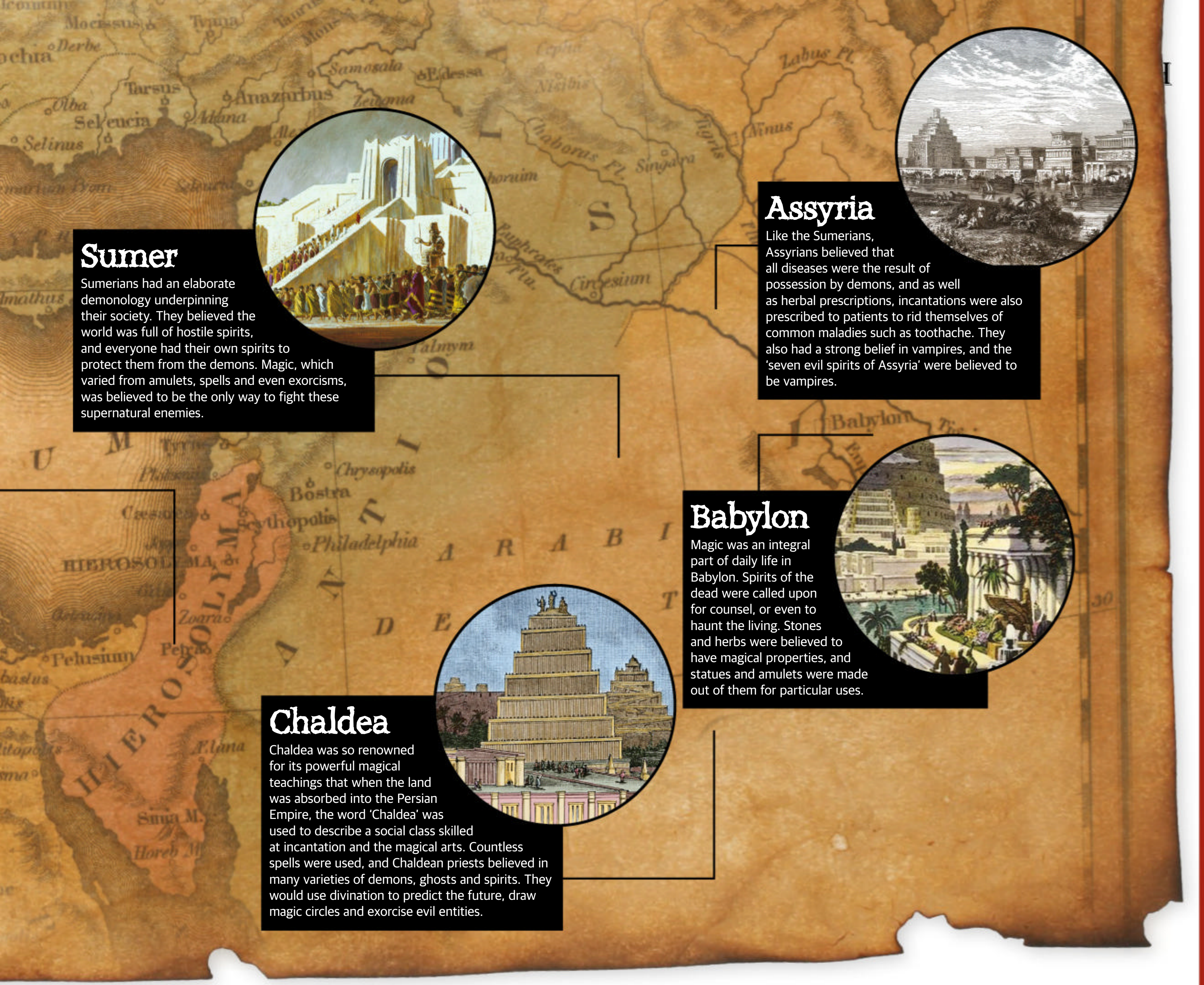
and the Romans, like the Greeks before them, hated nothing more than a powerful woman. Although both men and women were known to practise witchcraft, it was women who bore the brunt of the persecution.

Black magic and those who practised it were condemned in Roman law. Anyone who used magic to blight crops or to spread disease was punished severely. It was believed these sorceresses could make poisons, summon the dead, influence the weather and even shape-shift. The practice of burning witches occurred in Rome far before it became commonplace for Christians, and for the Roman rulers this presented a unique opportunity to deal with other undesirables, such as those who followed different religions.

Isis was an incredibly prominent figure who sat at the centre of a cult that threatened to extinguish the early sparks of Christianity. This female goddess was worshipped not only in Egypt but also throughout the Roman Empire. As well as being presented as a perfect mother and wife, Isis was a goddess of magic, but unlike the negative examples often displayed in myths, Isis seemed to represent the idealised form of a magical woman. She was friend to the downtrodden but also to the elite of society, and she was a devoted mother who used her powers for good. Although worship of her was initially frowned upon in the Roman Empire, when Emperor Caligula showed his support, the cult surrounding Isis began to flourish. The religion actually developed alongside Christianity in its most formative years, and there is some argument that this image of Isis as a heavenly mother with a prophesied son of kings influenced early Christianity.

Although the two religions grew side by side, they were simply incompatible, and sooner or later one would have to erase the other. In Christian texts there are no blurred lines regarding witchcraft, with the Bible stating that anyone who "casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead…is detestable to the Lord". To further drive the point home it also warns, "Do not allow a sorceress to live." For Christianity, witchcraft was seen as running counter to religion and even associated with the devil. Isis and her magic were

In 357 Constantinus banned the use of magic, claiming those who used it were enemies of the human race



Sumer

Sumerians had an elaborate demonology underpinning their society. They believed the world was full of hostile spirits, and everyone had their own spirits to protect them from the demons. Magic, which varied from amulets, spells and even exorcisms, was believed to be the only way to fight these supernatural enemies.

Assyria

Like the Sumerians, Assyrians believed that all diseases were the result of possession by demons, and as well as herbal prescriptions, incantations were also prescribed to patients to rid themselves of common maladies such as toothache. They also had a strong belief in vampires, and the 'seven evil spirits of Assyria' were believed to be vampires.

Babylon

Magic was an integral part of daily life in Babylon. Spirits of the dead were called upon for counsel, or even to haunt the living. Stones and herbs were believed to have magical properties, and statues and amulets were made out of them for particular uses.

Chaldea

Chaldea was so renowned for its powerful magical teachings that when the land was absorbed into the Persian Empire, the word 'Chaldea' was used to describe a social class skilled at incantation and the magical arts. Countless spells were used, and Chaldean priests believed in many varieties of demons, ghosts and spirits. They would use divination to predict the future, draw magic circles and exorcise evil entities.

regarded as evil Pagan beliefs. As Christianity spread, the cult of Isis and worship of any other Pagan gods was outlawed, and in the 6th century Isis' temple on the island of Philae, which had served as a pilgrimage site for thousands of years, was closed by the Christian Emperor Justinian.

Christianity also pointed the finger at adulterous women as the ultimate embodiment of evil, claiming that 'unconstrained women, perverted by Satan, profess to ride upon the backs of beasts with a countless horde of women'. These Pagan women were accused of 'infidelity' and being drawn into a 'pit of faithlessness'. As powerful female sorceresses such as Isis were condemned, it is easy to see how the perception of the dangerous female witch was encouraged, not eradicated, by the spread of Christianity.

Christianity itself did not spring out of the gate fully formed; it developed over years of labour and toil, and it is almost impossible to believe that it could not have been influenced by the religions around it. So many of these religions relied on witchcraft or belief in magic, so for Christianity, witchcraft was classed as a superstition, something that did not actually exist. Early Christianity actually established that belief in witchcraft alone was proof a person had been deceived by the devil and so could be executed. This set Christianity in opposition to many of the flourishing religions at the time and allowed for domination. Anyone who even believed witchcraft was possible (an essential part of many religions) was demonised, and heretic after heretic was executed. Just like the Greeks, Hebrews and Romans before them, the Christians used magic and witchcraft as a scapegoat and a way of demonising the different.

The cult of Isis was so powerful that Cleopatra claimed to be the goddess reincarnated

For almost as long as magic has existed, laws against it have prevailed. Often these views against witchcraft and those who practised magic were a response to religions spreading and encountering mysterious belief systems that ran in opposition to their own, such as in the case of the Jews and the spread of Christianity. Even in the societies that practised magic, such as ancient Greece and Rome, there were strict laws defining what was 'acceptable'. These depictions of magic users in myth were exploited to fuel an idealised image of how society – especially women – should behave, and any who rebelled were associated with the demonic figures from myth.

For centuries images of these infamous women from myth would be used to fuel common perceptions of female witches and stoke the fires that would claim the lives of hundreds and thousands of innocents.

15 Most Notorious Witches

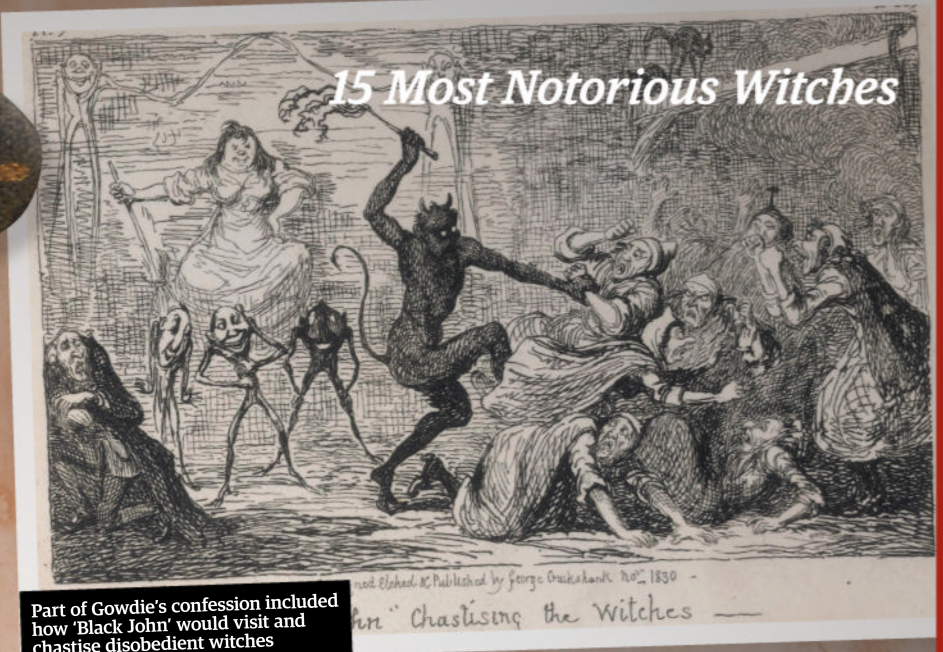
Meet the individuals whose status of witch – whether true or not – have helped shape the folklore of witches

It's difficult to strike the right chord when talking about witch trials and the events surrounding them as they are, through the eyes of a modern historian looking back, both violent and outlandish. Today, the phenomenon of charging people with crimes of magic and enchantment and putting them on trial seems more suited to a *Monty Python* sketch than events from a 'civilised' world. But of course, they were deadly and anything but ridiculous.

For centuries, thousands of people accused of witchcraft were tortured and killed in the most sadistic of ways. For the townsfolk and villagers living in the time of witch trials, you were either religious or you were damned. And so a pattern emerges in the tales – women who lived at the fringe of society, maybe on a second or third marriage and perhaps involved in healing. When the harvest is bountiful and the animals healthy, such figures can be tolerated. In the middle of a harsh winter, with failed crops or sick family members with an illness one can't understand, that outcast on the edge of town becomes a figure of suspicion.

As events gather pace, genuine fear and worry transform into hysteria and neighbours are being accused of anything from consorting with the devil, to eating babies, to smiting an enemy's crops to flying around on pitchforks. No longer were the trials about defeating the devil, they were about rivals settling old scores.

The accused had no hope – innocence was a hard thing to prove and many innocent actions would often be seen as indicative of witchcraft or enchantment. The price to pay was high and many of the accused awaited a grisly fate – hanging, being burned alive, drowning and beheading were common, and this was often after torture had secured a confession.


...ned Etched & Published by George Cruikshank Nov 1830
...hn" Chastising the Witches

Part of Gowdie's confession included how 'Black John' would visit and chastise disobedient witches

Isobel Gowdie

Location: Auldearn, Scotland
Year of accusation: 1662

Isobel Gowdie takes her place in this collection for two reasons. The first is that her remarkably detailed testimony provides insight into the folklore surrounding witchcraft towards the end of the witch-hunt era in Europe. The second is that she appears to have volunteered the information, no violent torture necessary.

Not much is actually know of Gowdie's life; it's generally agreed she was of low social status and most likely illiterate, but there are no records of whether she was arrested or came forward voluntarily. It is also generally agreed that she gave her confession without being tortured. On 10 April 1662, just three days before her first confession, the Privy Council prohibited torture being used to gain confessions from suspected witches.

Whatever she may have lacked in education and social standing, Gowdie more than made up for with her ability to tell a story. Her confessions range from how she renounced her baptism so the Devil could place his mark on her, to sexual encounters with the Devil; digging up a child's body; flying around on horses; socialising with the Queen of the Fairies; transforming into a jackdaw; killing people or animals with elf arrows made by the Devil and details of chants and spells. Her confessions also included names of other coven members, which lead to 41 people being arrested.

Although no record exists of Gowdie's death, before 1678 most Scottish witches tried by the Privy Council would have been executed, usually strangled and then burned.

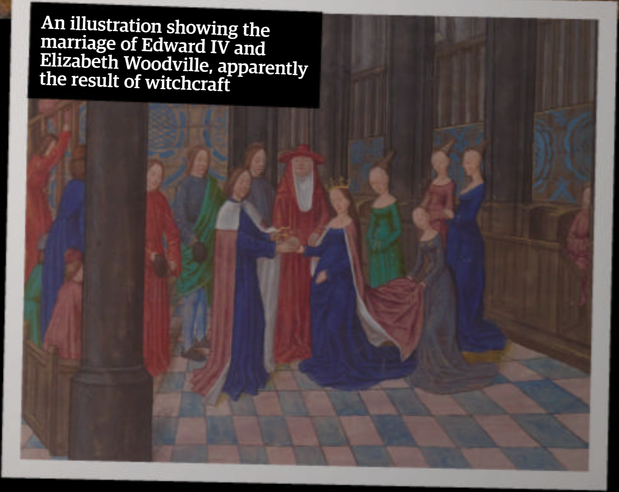
Jacquetta Woodville

Location: Warwick, England
Year of accusation: 1469

Despite her daughter, Elizabeth, being married to King Edward VI, and having numerous alliances with important figures, Jacquetta Woodville, Duchess of Bedford, was still accused of being a witch.

Her accuser was Thomas Wake. A follower of Richard Neville, Earl of Warwick, he picked a hell of a time to speak up. Edward IV been captured by the Earl of Warwick that year, and Woodville's husband and son had both been executed by Warwick. Wake headed to Warwick Castle, proudly brandishing a figure of a man made of lead, which Wake said Woodville used for witchcraft. He also convinced a parish clerk, John Daunger, to say that Woodville had made two other images; one for the king and one for the queen, and had used sorcery to secure the marriage. Woodville was arrested and transported to Warwick Castle.

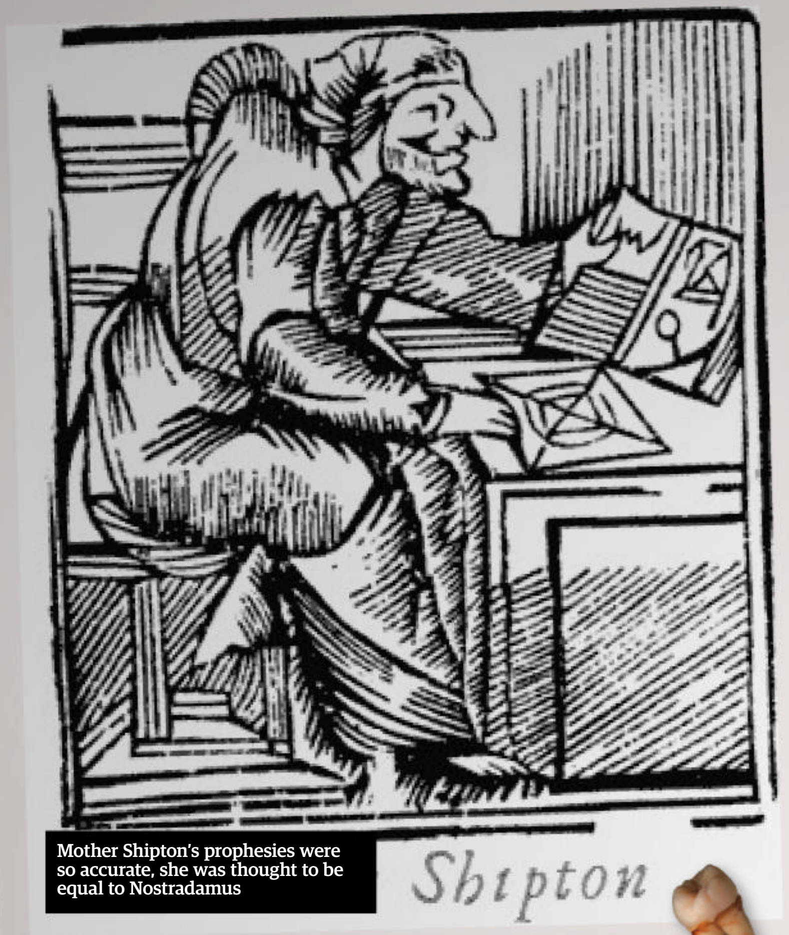
An illustration showing the marriage of Edward IV and Elizabeth Woodville, apparently the result of witchcraft



But Woodville refused to quietly accept her fate. She contacted the city officials of London, gently reminding them of how she had persuaded Margaret of Anjou to spare the city from Lancastrian hands. They agreed to help her and so swiftly got in touch with the Duke of Clarence, an ally of Warwick's.

The case against Woodville was tenuous at the best of times, but once Edward IV was released, it completely collapsed. In January 1470, Woodville rose up against Wake at the king's council, accusing him of having a vendetta against her. The 'witnesses' rounded up by Wake changed their story and she was acquitted. Woodville requested her exoneration to be part of the official record, which was agreed on 10 February 1470, though she never fully escaped allegations.

> "The case against Woodville was tenuous at the best of times"



Mother Shipton's prophesies were so accurate, she was thought to be equal to Nostradamus

Mother Shipton

Location: Knaresborough, Yorkshire
Year of accusation: N/A

Some say that the idea of a witch being a hideous, hook-nosed, sunken cheeked, warty, hunched old woman originated with the legend of Mother Shipton, an infamous 16th century prophetess.

The daughter of Agatha Southeil, herself a supposed witch, it is said Mother Shipton (real name Ursula) was born in a cave with a full set of teeth that stuck right out, protruding eyes and a deformed physique. She was thought to be the devil's child, and yet seems to have been taken in by the townsfolk.

Appearance aside, her legend lies in her ability to predict the future. Her forecasts were so accurate and in demand, that people would travel great distances to consult with her. She was often called upon to use her powers to help solve disputes, and so canny were her predictions that wrongdoers often confessed to their actions. But then her predictions started to become more grand. She is supposed to have predicted all sorts of events, from Mary, Queen of Scots being executed, to the defeat of the Spanish Armada, to the Great Plague of 1665. Her name is most closely linked with her prophecy of the Great Fire of London in 1666.

Mother Shipton died c1561. Richard Head edited a book of her prophecies, published in 1684. Although he later admitted to having made up most of the autobiographical details, Mother Shipton is still remembered as England's most famous prophetess.

Angéle de la Barthe

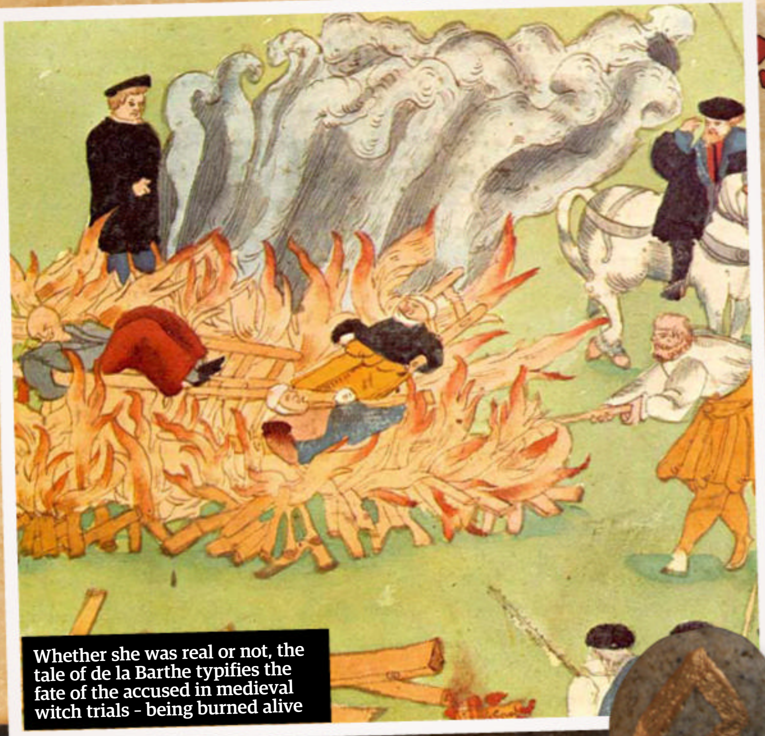
Location: Toulouse, France
Year of accusation: 1275

Having sex with the devil and giving birth to a monster with a wolf's head and a serpent's tail, whose sole source of food was babies are the reasons Angéle de la Barthe met her end.

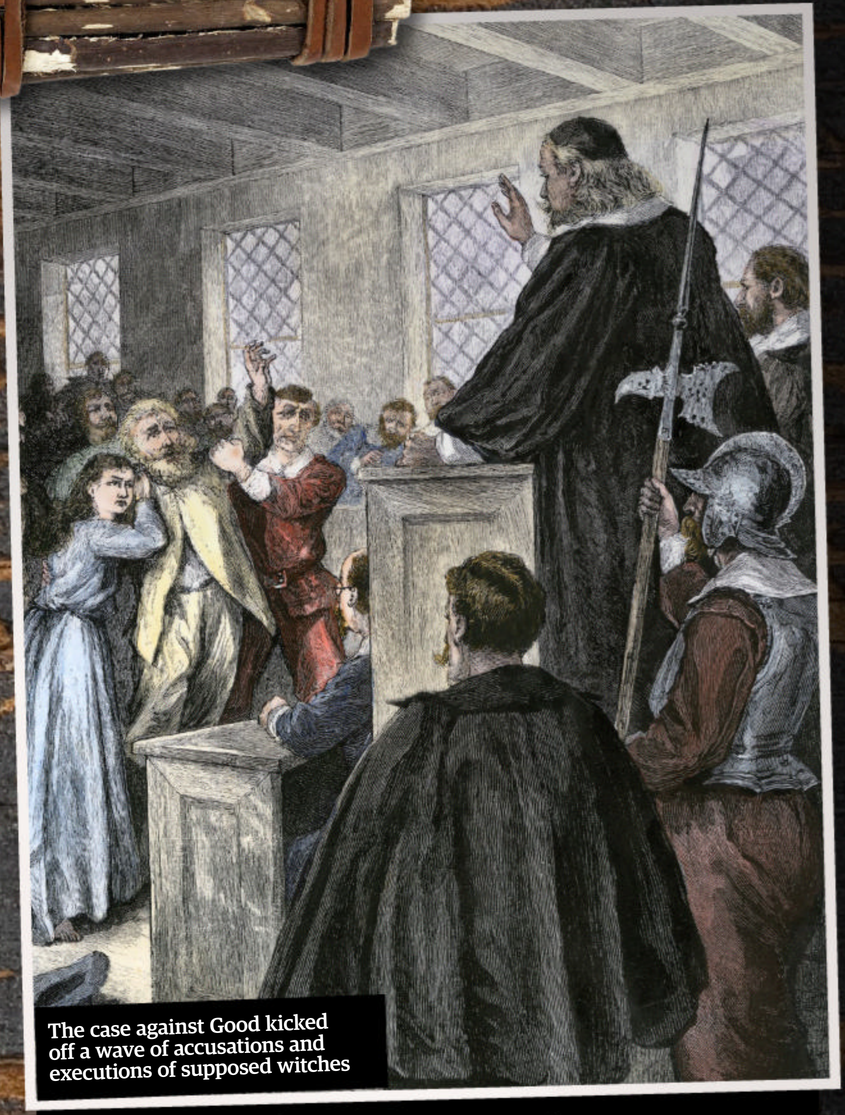
That, and the fact she was devoted to Catharism, a Gnostic Christian sect deemed heretical by the Catholic Church. Her accuser was Hugo de Benoils, an Inquisitor who claimed de la Barthe had kidnapped and killed children to feed her monster baby, and was responsible for many child disappearances for the past two years.

After being violently tortured, de la Barthe confessed to everything, saying that her baby-eating monster had flown away to avoid capture. She was found guilty and burned alive.

For a long time, de la Barthe was considered the first person to be executed for heretical sorcery in the medieval witch trials. However, her story is now largely regarded to be fictional because there is no evidence of the trial in court records. Also, more interestingly, having sex with demons was not considered illegal at the time. It has instead been suggested that de la Barthe was simply an easy target for religious fanaticism. She was probably a bit of an outsider, and fell victim to a zealot Inquisitor and a general mistrust of anything 'other'.



Whether she was real or not, the tale of de la Barthe typifies the fate of the accused in medieval witch trials - being burned alive



The case against Good kicked off a wave of accusations and executions of supposed witches

Sarah Good

Location: Salem, Massachusetts
Year of accusation: 1692

The Salem witch trials have near-mythical status, and the hysteria and speed with which people turned on each other perfectly exemplifies how fear leads to violence.

Sarah Good was one of the first victims of the trials. After losing her house and possessions to pay the debts of her first husband, she was forced to beg among the community. There are accounts of her sometimes cursing any who didn't help - an act born out of frustration and embarrassment that would go on to be used against her.

On 25 February 1692, Good was named by Abigail Williams and Elizabeth 'Betty' Parris as being one of three who cursed them, causing odd convulsions. The hearing began on 15 March, whereupon seeing Good, the two girls started to fit. One of them also accused Good of using a spectre to try and stab her, producing a broken knife as evidence. The fact that one of the spectators said it was his knife he had thrown away held no sway, though. The frenzy was on. Her own husband testified she had a witch's mark on her back, and then her daughter (who was four or five) showed a small bite on her finger, which she said was from a snake her mother had given her.

Good was hanged on 19 July 1692. After being urged by Nicholas Noyes, Salem's reverend, to confess, she replied "I'm no more a witch than you are a wizard, and if you take away my life, God will give you blood to drink." He later died of a brain haemorrhage.

Märet Jonsdotter

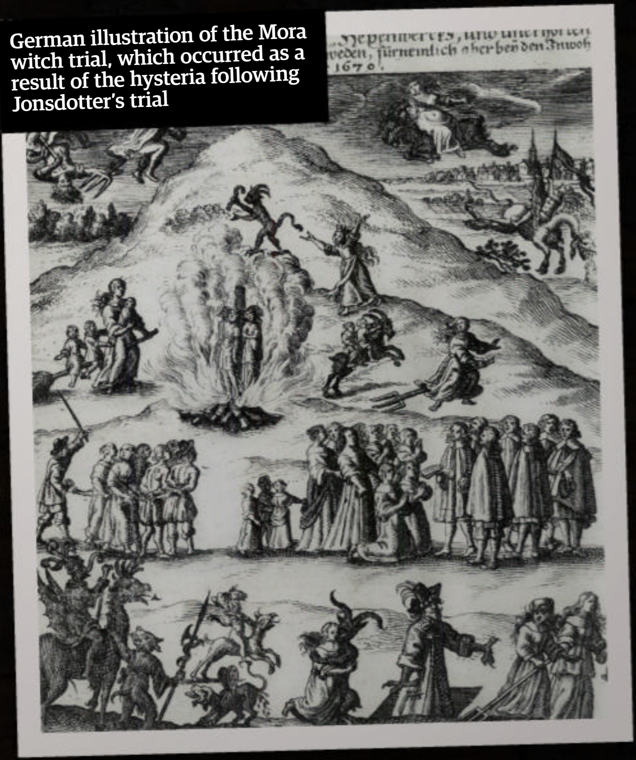
Location: Älvdalen, Sweden
Year of accusation: 1668 and 1672

The Great Noise (1668-76) was a witch hunt that ravaged through Sweden and Märet Jonsdotter had the displeasure of being the person who started it all. She was pulled into the madness thanks to a 12-year-old girl called Gertrud Svensdotter, who herself was being questioned for supposedly walking on water. Her response, no doubt encouraged by her questioners, was that she had been given the gift by someone in league with the Devil. That person was Märet Jonsdotter.

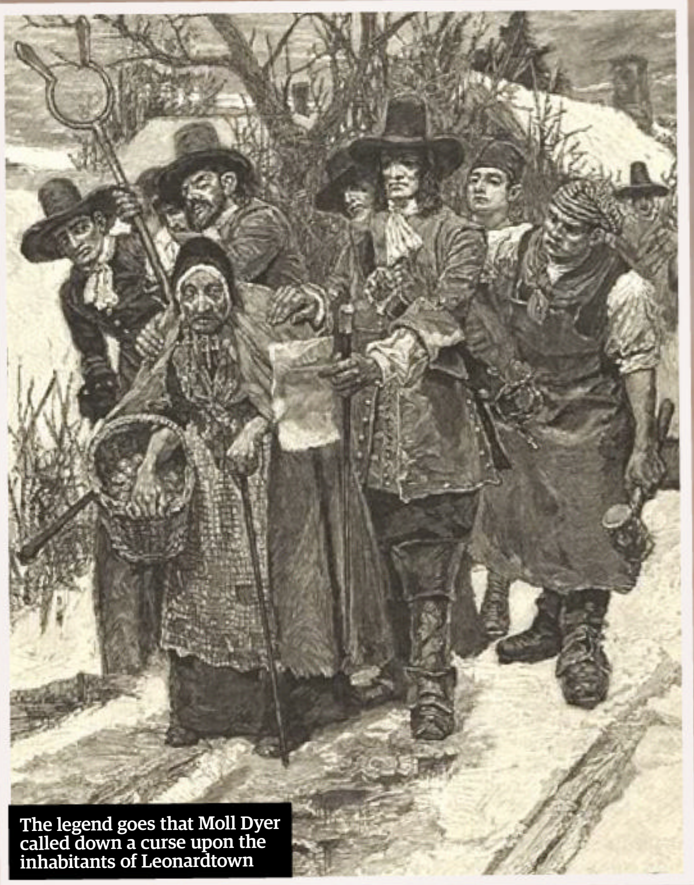
But there was a problem. Swedish law had banned he execution of anyone who didn't confess to a crime, and Jonsdotter consistently maintained her innocence. However, the court wanted a conviction, so a plan was conducted for the priests to tell her she was to be executed regardless of guilt, but if she confessed, she would receive holy communion and therefore allowed to enter heaven. But Jonsdotter still claimed innocence. The authorities reluctantly took her back to prison.

While Jonsdotter remained in prison, steadfastly proclaiming her innocence. a fearful hysteria was spreading over Sweden, with Jonsdotter's trial leading to the Mora witch trial. This saw 60 people accused of witchcraft, with 14 killed that year.

On 16 April 1672, the authorities ran out of patience and Jonsdotter was found guilty of witchcraft, due to the testimonies and devil's mark on her finger (a birthmark). She, along with 33 others, were executed in September 1672. In 1674, after suspecting that some accused proclaimed innocence to escape the death penalty, the court deemed it no longer necessary for a suspected witch to confess.


veden, fürnemlich aber beÿ den Inwoh
1670.

German illustration of the Mora witch trial, which occurred as a result of the hysteria following Jonsdotter's trial



The legend goes that Moll Dyer called down a curse upon the inhabitants of Leonardtown

Moll Dyer

Location: Leonardtown, Maryland
Year of accusation: 1697

The figure of Moll Dyer is interesting, because although largely accepted to be just a story, her tale perfectly illustrates the hysteria of the witch trials. Thought to be an Irish noblewoman who left her homeland to escape a nefarious past, Dyer took residence in an isolated cottage, occasionally working as a herbal healer. Her way of living made the locals suspicious, and so they labelled her a witch. But as long as she kept to herself, she wasn't a threat.

Unfortunately a series of natural events changed all that. The winter of 1697 in Maryland was particularly harsh, leaving many dead and scant food for those that survived. Eyes started to settle on Dyer, with rumours that she had cursed the town. Then an epidemic (probably influenza) ravaged the population, killing many. It was too much for some locals, who blamed Dyer. They set fire to her cottage on a freezing night, causing Dyer to flee into the woods. Succumbing to the elements, Dyer knelt by a large rock, rested one hand against it and with the other, called a curse upon the land and her persecutors. When her body was removed days later, it is said that her hand left an impression in the rock, as a permanent reminder of her curse.

The boulder is now outside the Leonardtown courthouse and although no handprint can be seen, visitors report suffering aches when near it. When the nights are at their coldest, there are also reports of a woman with long white hair and a white dress walking through the woods, and of a white dog causing accidents on Moll Dyer road.

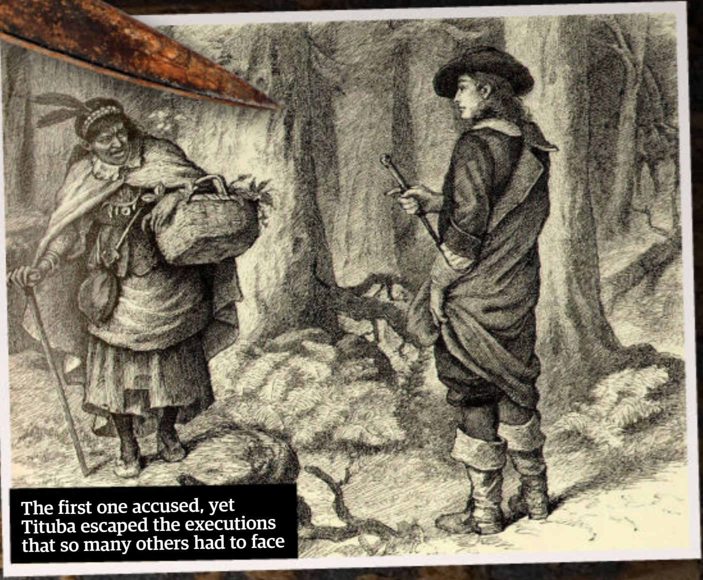
Alice Kyteler

Location: Kilkenny, Ireland
Year of accusation: 1324

The allegations against Dame Alice Kyteler are notable for including two firsts: her case is one of the first European witch trials and the first recorded claim of demon sex.

Kyteler had already been accused of murdering her first husband. But when her fourth husband, Sir John le Poer, became ill in 1324, he expressed concern that he had been poisoned. When he died, accusations were set in motion. His children rallied against Kyteler, claiming she had used poison and sorcery against their father. They also accused Kyteler, her servants and her son of denying Christianity, blasphemy, and making animal sacrifices to demons. The accusations were taken seriously, with Kyteler and her group being formally investigated for a host of acts, including heresy, using potions to corrupt Christians, murdering, and having a sexual affair with a demon.

Kyteler refused to meekly accept the charges, and used her influence to get the bishop dealing with her case, Richard de Ledrede, arrested. This caused the Lord Chief Justice, John Darcy, to travel to Kilkenny to see what was going on, and he subsequently vindicated the bishop. He quickly set about trying to get Kyteler arrested and turned his attention to her associates. Petronella de Meath, one of her servants, was the first to break and confessed to witchcraft after being viciously tortured. Her testimony led her to be the first person burnt at the stake for witchcraft in Ireland, and gave Kyteler's persecutors all they needed. She was convicted in 1325 but the night before her planned execution, she escaped, probably to England, and was never heard of again.



The first one accused, yet Tituba escaped the executions that so many others had to face

Tituba

Location: Salem, Massachusetts
Year of accusation: 1692

Tituba holds the dubious honour of being the first person accused in what went on to become the Salem witch trials. A Native American slave belonging to Reverend Samuel Parris, hers was the first name uttered by Abigail Williams and Elizabeth Parris as using sorcery to give them convulsions, closely followed by Sarah Osborne and Sarah Good. Unlike Good, Tituba confessed to the accusations and then went on to accuse others of witchcraft, a pattern that is seen in many other trials.

Perhaps surprisingly, given the fact she was both an accused witch and a foreigner to the people of Salem, Tituba was not sentenced to be executed. She did have to stay in prison for 13 months because Parris wouldn't pay her jail fees, but then an unknown person paid the fees and took her from the village. Nothing is known about her life after this.

Agnes Waterhouse

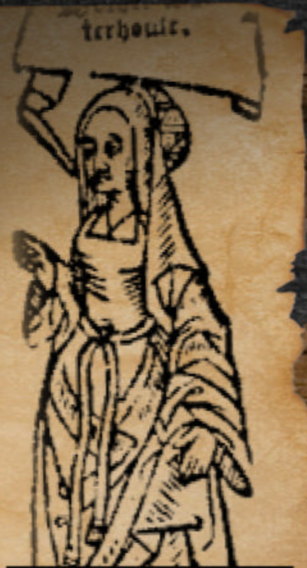
Location: England
Year of accusation: 1566

Agnes Waterhouse, or Mother Waterhouse as she is commonly known, is considered England's most famous witch and seems as though she was more than comfortable with her dark dallyings. She was also the first witch to be accused and sentenced by a secular court. It was rare for the Church not to be involved in trials.

Waterhouse had a cat called Satan, who she said could kill animals and which later transformed into a toad. Waterhouse's daughter, Joan, asked the toad for help after a neighbour's child, Agnes Brown, refused her some food. The toad said he would help if Joan would surrender her soul, which she agreed to. Deal made, the toad set about haunting Brown in the form of a black dog.

It is this that became the crux of the case against Waterhouse. During her testimony, Agnes described the dog as having horns on his head and threatening her with a knife. When she asked who the dog's "dame" was, the toad gestured to Waterhouse's home with his head.

That was all that was needed. Two days after the trial ended, Waterhouse was executed. Despite exhibiting bravado throughout the trial, when faced with death she prayed for God's forgiveness.



A woodcut of Agnes Waterhouse, the first witch sentenced by a secular court

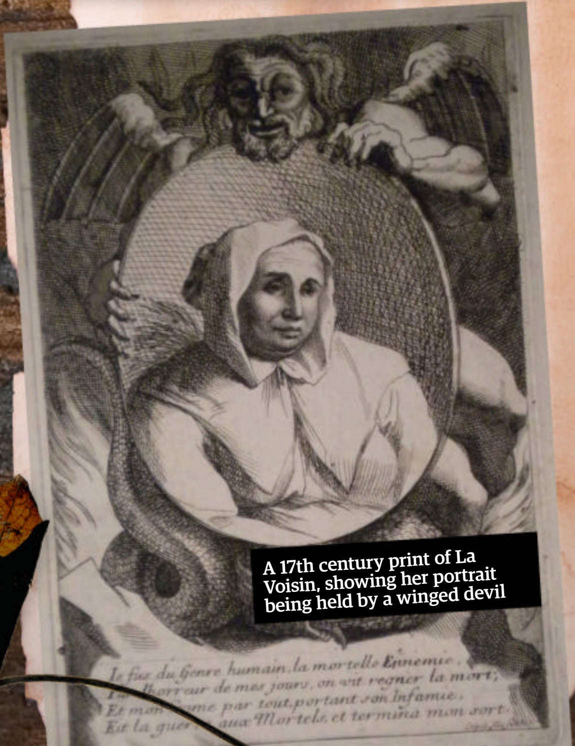
Catherine Monvoisin

Location: Paris, France
Year of accusation: 1680

Most commonly known as 'La Voisin', Catherine Monvoisin was an infamous French sorceress who became associated with the Affair of the Poisons; a series of murders supposedly the result of black masses. Although she was ultimately burned at the stake as a witch, her services of divination, potions and midwifery had made her a favourite among the elite Paris ladies.

But all this started to go wrong in 1675. The Marquise de Brinvilliers had been put on trial for poisoning her father and siblings. She was found guilty and executed, but her trial called attention to a number of suspicious deaths and as a result, alchemists and fortune tellers were rounded up and interrogated.

Poisoner and fortune teller, Marie Bosse, named La Voisin as being involved, and she was arrested. La Voisin herself implicated a number of important figures of the French court, including the king's mistress, the Marquise de Montespan. Her apparent willingness to help did her no favours, though. She was instead convicted of witchcraft and poisoning and burned on the Place de Grève in the centre of Paris.


Je fus du Genre humain, la mortelle Ennemie,
l'horreur de mes jours, on vit regner la mort;
Et mon[illegible] par tout portant son Infamie.
Est la [illegible] aux Mortels et termina mon sort.

A 17th century print of La Voisin, showing her portrait being held by a winged devil

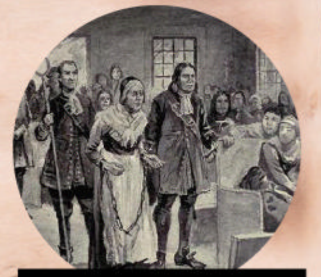
The witches that inspired film and TV

As well as offering a valuable social insight to the past, witches and witch trials have also inspired characters and plots in modern entertainment

THE WITCH (2015)

General 17th century

Although not based on one real witch figure, filmmaker Robert Eggers spent a long time researching the witch trials of the period to capture the mood of the film. And it worked. The tale of one family descending into madness and tragedy, with suspicion of the eldest daughter being a witch, perfectly captures how trying environments, lack of food and superstition can tip people over the edge.

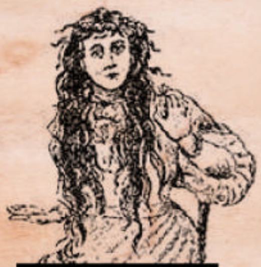


The classic figure of locals rounding up suspected witches prevailed in the New World

AN AMERICAN HAUNTING (2005)

The tale of the Bell Witch

The summer of 1817 was the beginning of the Bell Witch haunting in Tennessee. Centring around John Bell's family, specifically his daughter Betsy, the story soon spread, especially when the witch apparently said she would kill John Bell. He did die in 1820, supposedly poisoned by the witch. While a sad tale, the film amplifies and invents details, even taking a foray into child abuse.

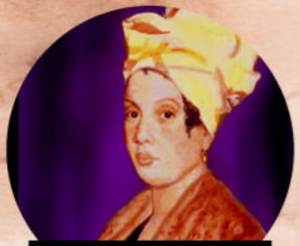


Betsy Bell, the victim of the Bell Witch

AMERICAN HORROR STORY: COVEN (2013)

Marie Laveau

There are many characters based on real figures in this third series of the *AHS* franchise, but Marie Laveau is perhaps the most recognisable. Anglea Bassett's portrayal of the renowned voodoo queen is based on the infamous New Orleans figure of the 1800s. While there aren't many specifics known about her life, she has gained legendary status, especially in New Orleans.



Voodoo queen Marie Laveau enjoyed notoriety in New Orleans

Alizon Device

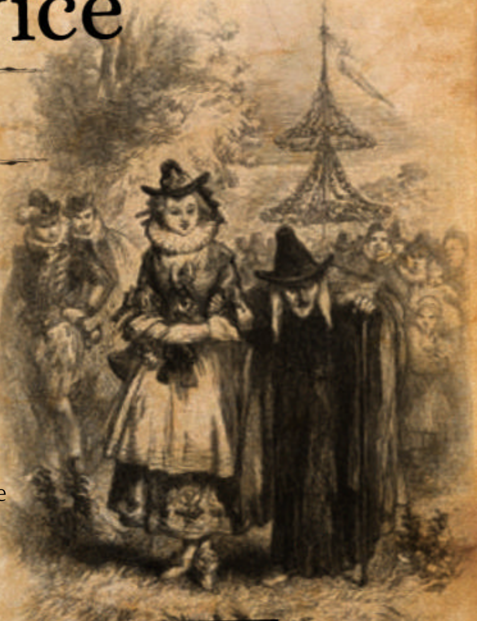
Location: Lancashire, England
Year of accusation: 1612

The case of Alizon Device and John Law caught the attention of local magistrate, Roger Nowell, culminating in the Pendle witch trials.

It starts off innocently enough. Alizon Device, the granddaughter of Demdike, who was commonly regarded as a witch, was on her way to Trawden Forest. She met John Law, who worked as a pedlar, and asked him for some pins. In the 17th century, pins were known as being used in healing and love magic. Law refused the request, either because Device had no money, or because he didn't want to sell a small quantity. The two parted ways, but then Device saw Law fall from his horse, possibly having suffered a stroke.

To begin with, Law made no accusation of Device having harmed him, but she was apparently convinced she had unleashed her powers against him, and asked his forgiveness.

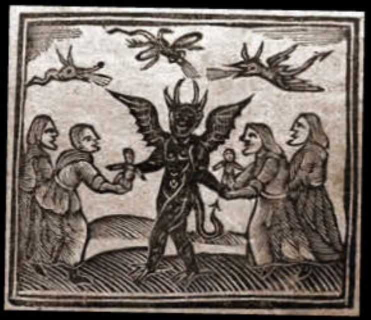
Device, her mother and brother were hauled before Nowell. Device said she had sold her soul to the devil and her brother told of how she had bewitched a child. Device was asked about Anne Whittle, the matriarch of another family linked with witchcraft. It is thought there was bad blood between the two, and Device accused Whittle of killing four men using witchcraft. There was no mercy, and Device was hung at Gallows Hill.



Anne Whittle, who Device accused of murdering four men, including her father

Agnes Sampson

Location: Nether Keith, Scotland
Year of accusation: 1590



The first victim of the North Berwick witch trials, which culminated in 70 executions, Agnes Sampson was accused and found guilty of witchcraft and conspiring to harm the king and queen.

It all began on Halloween night, when Sampson attended a witch's sabbat, said to be hosted by Satan himself. During this meeting, the witches used their power to generate a killer storm over the North Sea, the purpose of which was to sink the ship Queen Anne was sailing on to travel to Scotland. Although the queen had to abandon the trip, the ship managed to stay afloat.

Seeming to want another chance, Sampson is then accused of summoning another violent storm over the North Sea, this time to target the ship that King James VI was sailing on. The king was piqued by the thought of witchcraft, and would often question the witches himself in the flurry of trials that took place in Scotland in 1590. In fact, James was not convinced of Sampson's guilt at first, but after her last confession, he soon changed his mind. Sampson was found guilty and garotted and burned at the stake on Castlehill.

> "The king was piqued by the thought of witchcraft, and would question the witches himself"

Walpurga Hausmännin

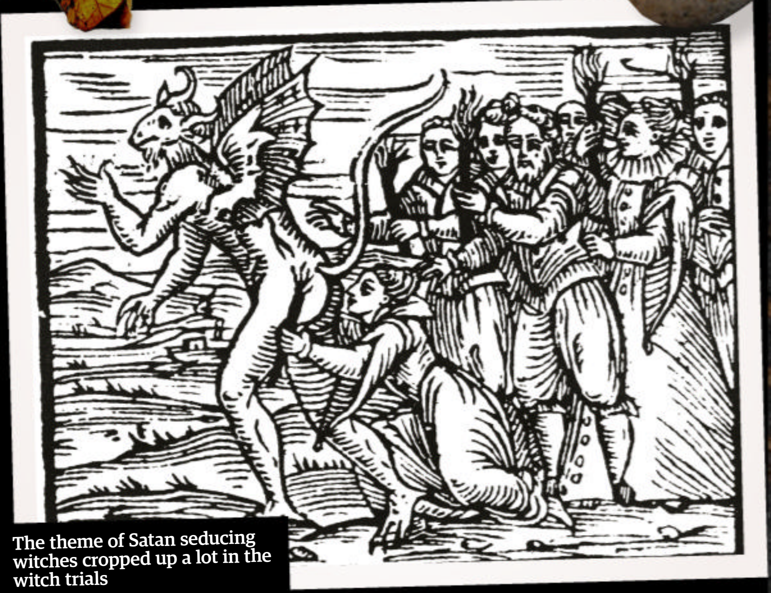
Location: Dillingen, Germany
Year of accusation: 1587

Walpurga Hausmännin was a widow who had worked as a midwife for 19 years before being arrested and accused of witchcraft, vampirism and child murder. It isn't quite known where the accusations came from, but she made a series of unbelievable confessions while she was being tortured. Her supposed life of depravity began shortly after being widowed in 1556, when she arranged a tryst with a co-worker. Although he didn't show up a demon came in his place and had sex with Hausmännin.

Things obviously went well, because this demon (called Federlin) met with her again and promised her a life without poverty if she would swear herself to Satan. She did, so Ferderlin whisked her off on a flying pitchfork to Old Scratch himself, where they confirmed the contract, ate some roasted babies and engaged in sex.

Hausmännin went on to describe how Federlin gave her an ointment that she used to harm harvests, children, adults and animals. She also confessed to killing 40 children while working as a midwife, murdering them before they were baptised, sucking their blood and then eating them with other witches.

Both the Church and the imperial court found her guilty and sentenced her to death. She was paraded through the city, stopping at various points to be tortured. Over the course of five or six stops, she had both breasts, both arms and her left hand torn with irons. Upon reaching the place of execution, her right hand, which she had used to make her oath as a midwife, was cut off, after which she was burned alive at the stake and her ashes disposed of in a stream.


The theme of Satan seducing witches cropped up a lot in the witch trials

This tower was used as a prison for accused witches during the Fulda witch trials

Merga Bien

Location: Fulda, Germany
Year of accusation: 1603

Fulda was not an ideal place to live if you were different from the norm, and it certainly wasn't a good place for Merga Bien. For she became one of the most famous to be killed during the Fulda witch trials of 1603-05.

It's a familiar story - zealous religious figure (Prince-Abbot Balthasar von Dernbach) declares witches to be the cause of everything that's wrong and so launches a widespread hunt. Although it's slightly ironic in this case, given that Dernbach had actually been exiled because his behaviour was deemed inappropriate. His first act upon the exile being lifted was to order the hunt, to root out all ungodly activities.

Unfortunately for Bien, she was also returning to Fulda, and directly into the storm. Her return not only found a place full of fear and suspicion, she also discovered she was pregnant. This was not such big news in itself, but she had been married to her husband for 14 years without conceiving. Now that she was pregnant, the townspeople came to the only natural conclusion - the Devil made her pregnant.

Bien was arrested, forced to confess to having killed her second husband and children, a child of her current husband's employers and also that she had attended black sabbaths. She also had to confess to the pregnancy caused by Satan.

Bien was found guilty and burned at the stake in the autumn of 1603. She would become one of over 200 people accused and executed as part of the Fulda witch trials.

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Lighting the Pyre

How medieval Europe went from disbelieving in the power of witches to fearing a sinister secret society bent on subverting the masses

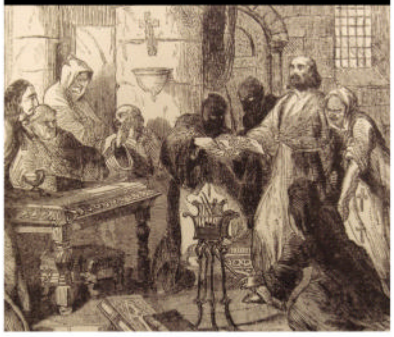
The Middle Ages get a bad press in all sorts of areas. In the history of witchcraft, the idea of zealous medieval inquisitors consigning an old crone to the flames because of the slander of a neighbour and a reputation as a 'wise woman' is well established – and not always true.

In fact, the witch trials and witch crazes of Europe and North America were a product of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, when men, having cast off the shackles of medieval superstition, became convinced through all the best and most scientific of arguments that there really were witches in their midst and resolved to burn them out. Think of the treatment of magic in medieval romances as compared to Shakespeare and Jacobean drama. In the former, there is magic, but it is fantastical – magical, no less. But as we enter Elizabethan and Jacobean Britain, magic moves from the realm of fantasy to a present danger. In medieval times, to encounter magic meant to enter the realm of faerie; in Shakespeare and Marlowe it meant the necromancer next door.

> A charm to get rid of a husband: cover yourself in honey, roll naked in grain, then bake him bread from the resulting mix

During that vast expanse of time from the fall of the Western Roman Empire to the dawning of the Renaissance, the idea of witchcraft was both popularly accepted and officially dismissed. This was in distinction to Roman law, which had stipulated that sorcerers be executed, although that did not stop many an emperor from including soothsayers in their private entourages. Curse tablets (execrations against some person the writer wished to harm) were common throughout the Roman period and an accepted form of redress in an age without courts or police forces. But should someone go

Jacques de Molay, Grand Master of the Knights Templar, is interrogated after torture by the men of Philip the Fair



From Templars to Trials

One of the key events in European history that helped to conflate the ideas of sorcery and heresy was the condemnation of the Poor Fellow-Soldiers of Christ and of the Temple of Solomon, the Knights Templar.

King Philip the Fair of France, having determined to destroy the Knights Templar to obtain their resources and negate his huge debts to them, needed a pretext. The Knights had a reputation for secrecy that had allowed rumours as to their practices to flourish. At dawn on Friday, 13 October, 1307, Philip's agents arrested the master of the order and its highest officers and put them to torture in various locations. The warrant for their arrest began with a telling phrase: "God is not pleased. We have enemies of the faith in the kingdom."

Under unimaginable duress they confessed to heretical acts, blasphemy and sorcery. Although there was little basis in these accusations, they provided sufficient pretext, when combined with the pressure Philip placed on the trial judges, to ensure the condemnation and execution of Jacques de Molay, the order's Grand Master, and the suppression of the Templars. As well as connecting sorcery and heresy in the European mind, it also prefigured another key aspect of later witchcraft trials: that the prosecuting authority was not the church but the secular authorities.

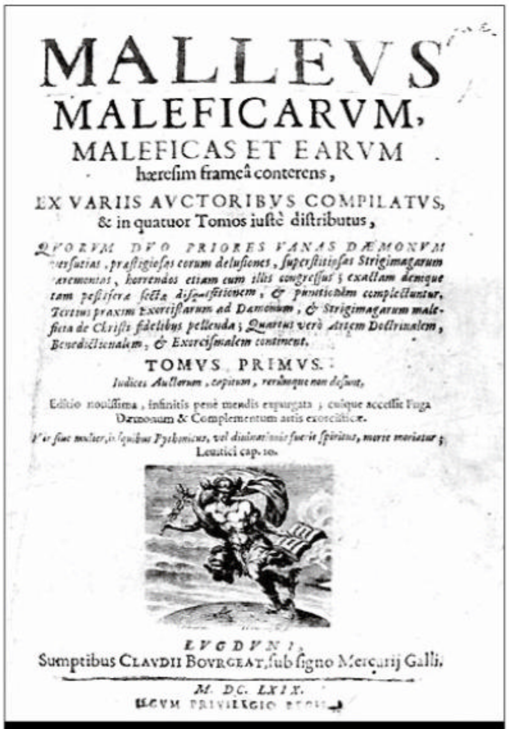
A curse tablet. It reads, "I curse Tretia Maria and her life and mind and memory and liver and lungs mixed up together, and her words, thoughts and memory; thus may she be unable to speak what things are concealed, nor be able." (Translation by the British Museum)

further and contract a necromancer to curse a person to death, then Roman law specified death by burning as punishment for such a crime.

In comparison, the law code promulgated by Charlemagne in the 8th century stipulated that if the accused, believing someone to be a witch, had that person burned, then the accused should be executed for murder. Such a turnaround conformed with the teaching of the Catholic Church, which stated that witchcraft was superstition. For according to no less an authority than St Augustine, and as formulated in the *Canon Episcopi* in the 10th century, the supposed power of witches was purely illusory: it was the persistent belief in the reality of these powers that was heretical. The Canon, which was part of church law, did mention that some women believed that they could fly through the night on the backs of fell beasts, but it labelled such women as 'foolish' and 'stupid' for believing that they could do such things. The fault, according to the Canon, lay in being tricked by the Devil into believing such powers were real, rather than the reality of witching powers, which it labelled as illusory.

However, common folk remedies and charms of the time could, when viewed with the more suspicious eyes of later witch hunters, easily come to be viewed as magical. For instance, as a ward against lightning people wore sealskin, or a farmer might ask a virgin to plant a new olive tree to ensure a fruitful crop. But these were all largely practices of the common people. The practice of sorcery in the middle ages was a real concern, but since it required learning and education the people accused of it were largely male, since few women could read Latin, the language of scholarship.

Necromancy, as this form of sorcery was called, involved summoning the dead. Belief in its possibility was widespread in the middle ages, having its foundation in the story of Samuel and the witch of Endor. Saul, king of Israel, facing an invasion by the Philistines and still tormented by his envy for the young David, repaired to a witch and required her to summon the spirit of the prophet Samuel from the dead. She did so, and the spirit of Samuel told Saul that he had forfeited God's warrant and that on the morrow the Philistines would utterly defeat his army and he himself would die. With this Biblical warrant, the possibility of summoning the dead for the purposes of prophecy and the unveiling of mysteries was accepted, but the means to accomplish this were generally written in grimoires, magical text books that told, sometimes in code and usually in Latin, how to perform the requisite ceremonies. So any putative necromancer needed not only to be able to read, but to read Latin too. As such, records show that the majority of people accused of necromancy in the first half of the 14th century were men.



MALLEVS
MALEFICARVM,
MALEFICAS ET EARVM
hæreſim frameâ conterens,
EX VARIIS AVCTORIBVS COMPILATVS,
& in quatuor Tomos iuſtè diſtributus,

QVORVM DVO PRIORES VANAS DÆMONVM verſutias, præſtigioſas eorum deluſiones, ſuperſtitioſas Strigimagarum cæremonias, horrendos etiam cum illis congreſſus; exactam denique tam peſtiferæ ſectæ diſquiſitionem, & punitionem complectuntur. Tertius praxim Exorciſtarum ad Dæmonum, & Strigimagarum maleficia de Chriſti fidelibus pellenda; Quartus verò Artem Doctrinalem, Benedictionalem, & Exorciſmalem continent.

TOMVS PRIMVS.
Indices Auctorum, capitum, rerùmque non deſunt.

Editio nouiſſima, infinitis penè mendis expurgata; cuique acceſſit Fuga Dæmonum & Complementum artis exorciſticæ.

Vir ſiue mulier, in quibus Pythonicus, vel diuinationis fuerit ſpiritus, morte moriatur;
Leuitici cap. 10.

LVGDVNI,
Sumptibus CLAVDII BOVRGEAT, ſub ſigno Mercurij Galli.

M. DC. LXIX.
CVM PRIVILEGIO

The *Malleus Maleficarum* was one of the key texts that put in place the intellectual foundations for the later witch trials

However, by the 15th and 16th centuries, beliefs had begun to change. The reasons for this shift are complex, but a major contributory factor were the profound dislocations produced by the recurring outbreaks of the Black Death in the 14th century and the consequent perceived spread of heretical sects. To the medieval worldview, such a calamity required a cause in some falling away by society from God's laws, and thus the search for scapegoats began. The first victims were Europe's Jewish communities, but in the febrile atmosphere widespread among the survivors, suspicions spread more widely. So we find that church authorities, having initially pooh-poohed the reality of sorcerous powers in earlier times, began to entertain the belief that these powers were real. The idea of the witches' sabbat, where women entered into a pact with the Devil and committed all sorts of terrible acts, began to be accepted as true.

> Some scholars argue there really was a witch cult composed of marginalised people who preserved some ancient beliefs

With the idea of a pact with the Devil in place, it became possible to countenance uneducated people being able to perform the powerful acts of magic that had previously only been associated with necromancers. After all, while a simple village woman would obviously not have the knowledge necessary for casting spells, once she had made a pact with the Devil, he could supply the knowledge that the witch lacked. Theologians began to work out the implications of such ideas, with disastrous consequences. Covens of witches, as opposed to solitary practitioners, implied an organised, secret cult, and one antithetical to society. What was worse, this cult was hidden within the body of believers: the enemy was within. The response was an explosion in witch trials.

Before 1420, there are less than a 100 recorded witch trials in Europe. Over the next ten years, the number of accusations jumps, with some 200 people having been executed. Where before magic had been an illusion caused through the Devil's trickery, now it became an active collusion with Satan and, as such, the worst sort of heresy. With the link between witchcraft, the Devil and heresy established to the satisfaction of Europe's educated elites, the elements were in place for the unleashing of all-too-human demons.

Even so, the idea would likely have remained confined to the clerical and secular elites of Europe if not for one transformative and, in this case, disastrous invention: the printing press. We are used to thinking of the printing press as one of the most beneficial inventions in human history, but in one area at least, it served a malevolent function. For it was through the widespread dissemination of books and pamphlets made possible by this new-fangled invention that the idea of the evil witch in league with the Devil spread through all reaches of European society.

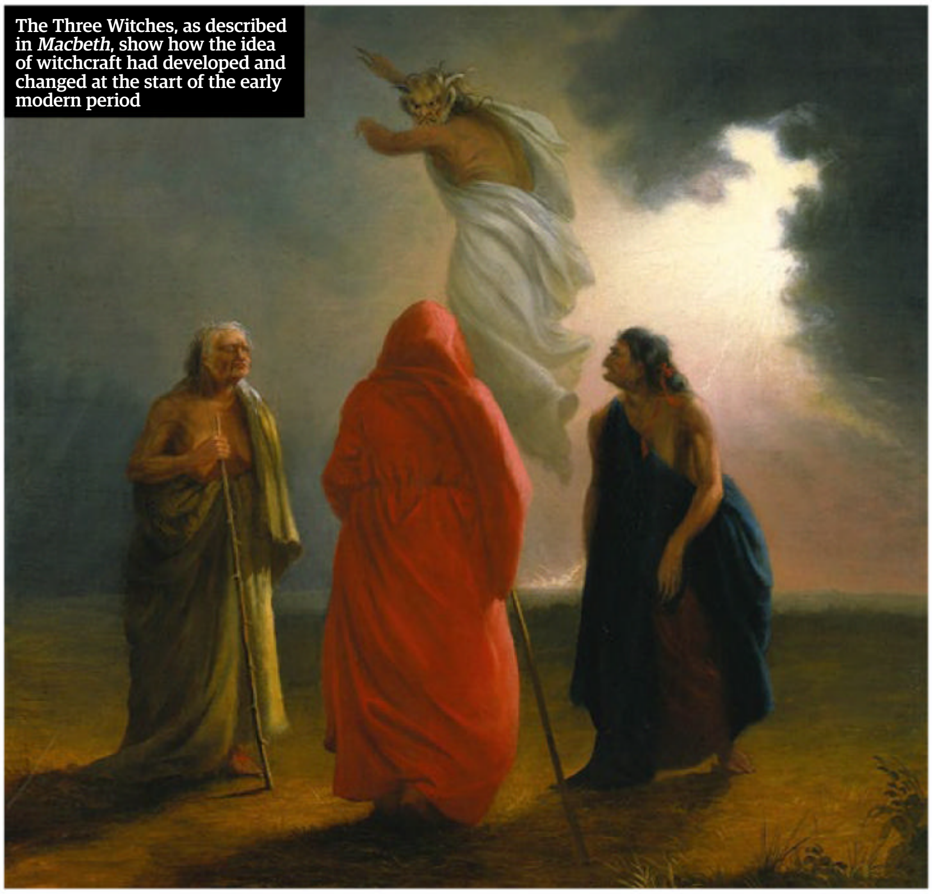
In 1472, Heinrich Kramer's *Malleus Maleficarum* (*Hammer of Witches*) was published, synthesising the Devil's brew of ideas that would inform the later European witch trials, and in particular the identification of women with witches. Kramer believed that women's spiritual weakness and a proclivity to evil that he traced back to Eve dangling the apple of temptation under Adam's nose made them naturally susceptible to the Devil's blandishments. Couple this with woodcut illustrations of hags and crones riding broomsticks, and the popularisation of witches and sorcery in contemporary culture that reached its literary heights in Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and Marlowe's *Dr Faustus*, and the confluence of ideas that formed the early modern idea of the witch was nearly complete.

Accusations of witchcraft were generally levelled by neighbours, so the panic may have been due to village tensions

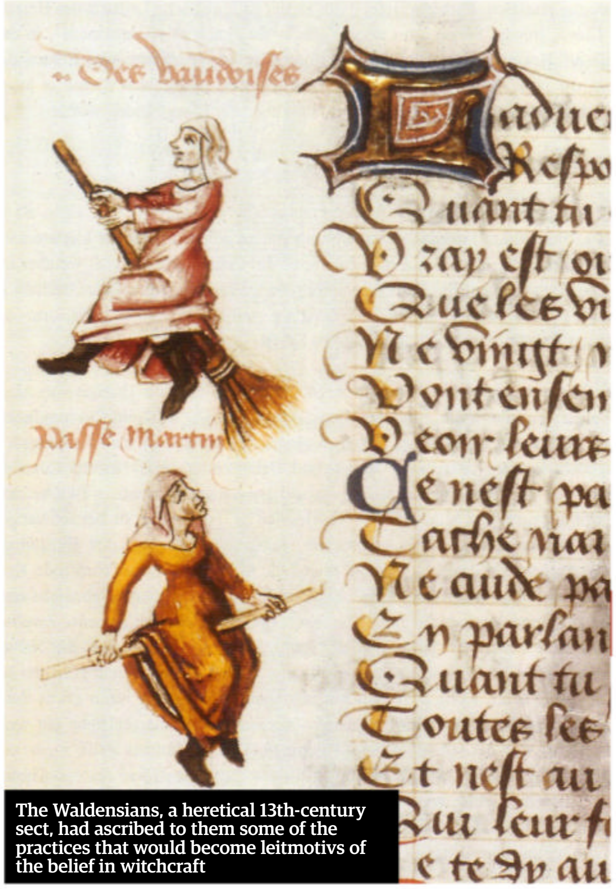
All that was needed was the final ingredient: the conviction of the educated classes that magic was in fact real. This conviction was provided by, of all people, the Renaissance humanists. For in their rediscovery of ancient knowledge, among the most prized of their findings was the ancient Hermetic wisdom of Egypt, and the speculations of the Pythagoreans and Kabbalists. Humanists such as Marsilio Ficino and Erasmus viewed this as high magic, but once that was admitted as real then its counterpart, black magic, became its necessary counterpoint.

In a time when the educated elites were busy dabbling in numerology and astrology, it was easy to imagine similar but diabolical groups gathered in covens for the ruin of the world. The stage was set for the age of witch persecutions.

> "What was worse, this cult was hidden within the body of believers: the enemy was within"



The Three Witches, as described in *Macbeth*, show how the idea of witchcraft had developed and changed at the start of the early modern period



The Waldensians, a heretical 13th-century sect, had ascribed to them some of the practices that would become leitmotivs of the belief in witchcraft

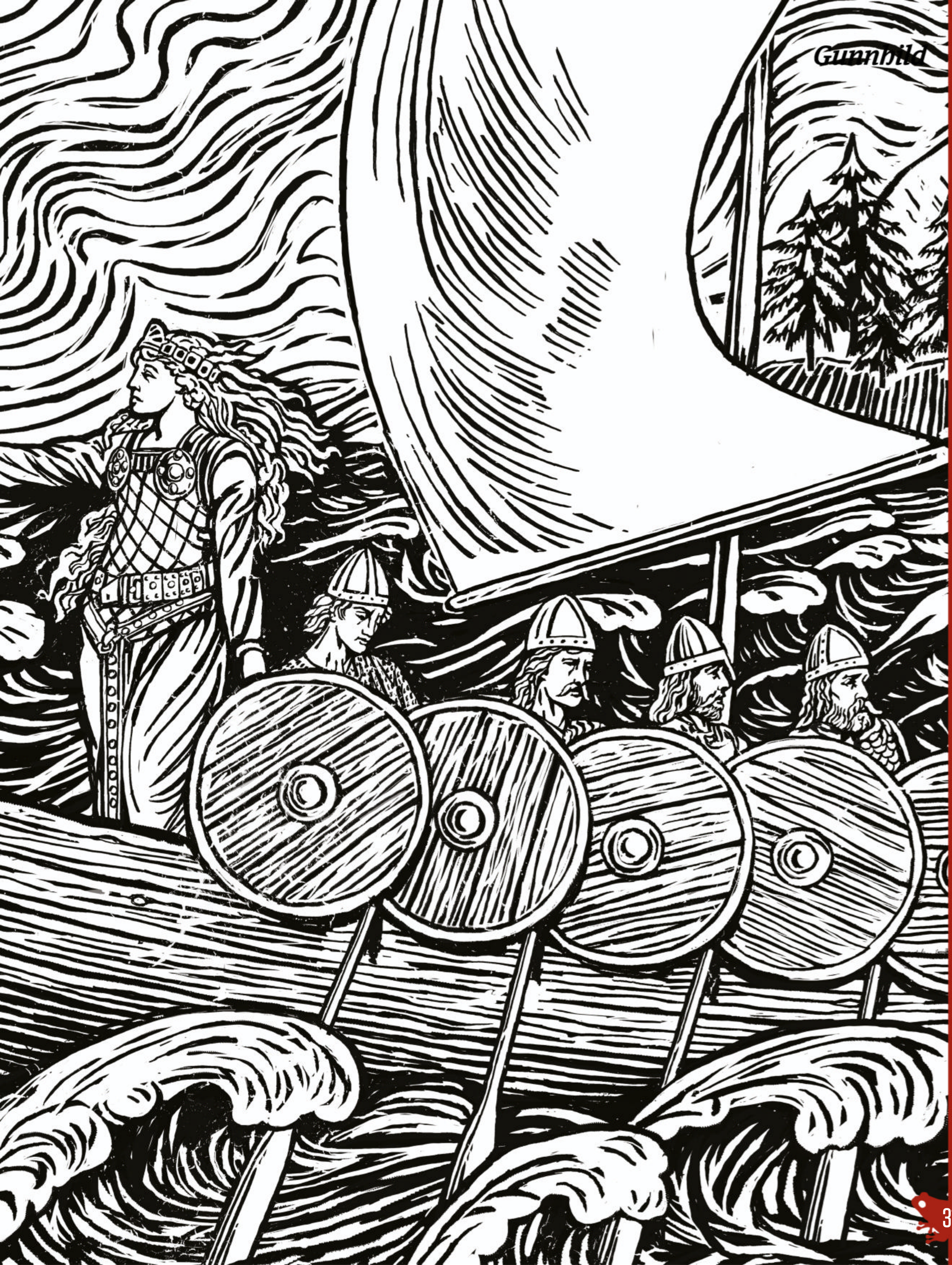
Gunnhild, Mother of Kings

Her legend steeped in witchcraft, power and intrigue, Gunnhild's story marks the moment where fact and fantasy blur

Gunnhild, the infamous Viking queen that ruled over three nations, had many names: queen, sorceress, mother to a generation. Seen as a scourge to kings and kin alike, much of what we know of her must be pieced together from fragmented stories and the bile of her enemies. Many argue that she is a work of fiction, an amalgamation of various characters, all pulled together by later authors as a plot device in their political stories.

While her origins are shrouded in mystery, we do know that she was the 10th-century wife of Erik Bloodaxe, King of Norway, Orkney and Northumbria, with Gunnhild serving as his fierce queen. Most likely the daughter of Gorm the Old, King of Denmark, Gunnhild and Erik Bloodaxe were introduced to one another at a feast held by Gunnhild's father. In this version, their union was intended to join two houses: the Norwegian Yngling family and the early Danish monarchy. Yet a much darker story is told in the Icelandic sagas, where she is instead the daughter of Ozur Toti from Hálogaland in northern Norway. In this version, Erik Bloodaxe meets Gunnhild when he is given five warships by his father, King Harald Fairhair of Norway, and sets out on a long journey that ends in Finnmark - a remote northeasterly corner of Norway.

Here, they find a beautiful woman, held captive by two Finnar wizards. This is Gunnhild. She tells the visitors that while the men are the wisest sorcerers in Finnmark and they teach her their magic, they both want to marry her. She says that nothing can escape them, as they can track as well as dogs, and when they are angry the ground turns about, and all living things fall down dead. She beseeches the men to hide and lie in wait for the sorcerers, as they have killed all men that have been to the hut so far. On their return, Gunnhild soothes the wizards, promising that no one has visited while they were out, yet that night both men stayed awake, each jealously watching the other. Gunnhild called both to her bed, waiting



Gunnhild

“Gunnhild’s reputation went from scheming and unruly to ruthless and politically dangerous”

until they slept soundly. She hurriedly tied them up, placing bags over their heads. She signalled to the hiding visitors, who jumped up and killed the wizards instantly, making for Erik’s ship the next day. Gunnhild sailed with Erik to Hálogaland to ask her father’s permission for their marriage, which he gave, and then they set sail together for the south.

While we, as modern readers, might have sympathy with Gunnhild being held by two men against her will, at the time these stories were written down as histories of the people, attitudes were very different. This story would help readers to believe that Gunnhild was a sorceress and murderer, certainly not a suitable wife for a king. We can see the seeds of doubt being planted in the minds of the people that King Erik’s later reign of tyranny and bloodshed can be blamed on Gunnhild, and her reputation is only compounded as her story progresses, when she is painted as the archenemy of the legendary hero, Egil Skallagrímsson – the protagonist of *Egil’s Saga*, the earliest copy of which dates from the 12th century.

The pair have a long history in the sagas, coming together time after time, in a battle of wits steeped in death and treachery. Their story begins at a feast to the guardian spirits, where Egil insulted his hosts, Gunnhild and Erik, by boasting that their beer could not quench his thirst, a dire insult to their hospitality. Gunnhild retaliated by mixing together a poison to kill Egil, yet, realising what was happening, Egil – who was said to wield his own magic – made a spell against them by cutting runes into the drinking horn and smearing his blood on to it, before killing their overlooker and making his escape. Egil evaded Gunnhild’s vengeance often and she was infuriated at his insult and trickery.

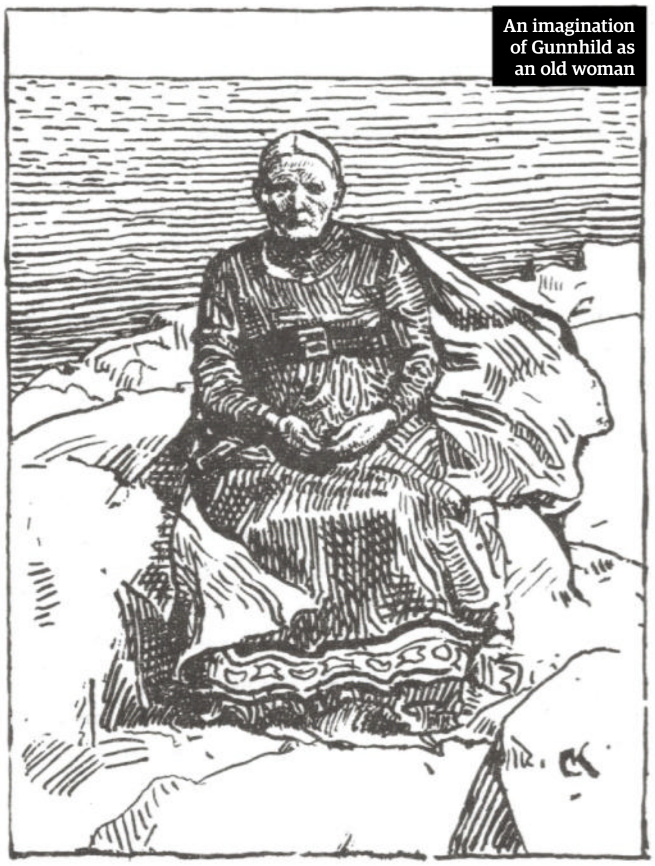
It’s in the middle of the story that Gunnhild’s reputation went from scheming and unruly to ruthless and politically dangerous. When Harald Fairhair was 80 years old, he turned over rule of the kingdom to Erik, giving him sole control over all of his lands, and naming Gunnhild’s own son, Harald Greycloak, as the next heir. Erik’s brothers were enraged by this decision and a savage feud ensued, ending in bloodshed on all sides, with Erik notoriously killing four of them. Many of the jarls blamed Gunnhild’s sinister machinations for his actions in her relentless quest for power. Mutterings of how Queen Gunnhild hired a witch to brew a poison to kill Hálfdan the Black at a banquet could not be quelled, and with this mistrust they chose another of the brothers, Sigröth, as their ruler. Erik and Gunnhild’s control was diminishing, and something had to be done.

In the time after Harald Fairhair’s death, Erik went to war against his brothers, raising a great army and winning victory at Túnsberg, and killing two of his brothers Óláf and Sigröth to secure his reign. While still reveling from their victory, a tragic course of events were set in motion when Rögnvald, Gunnhild’s son, was killed by Egil during a raid. As a further blow to the royal couple, Egil set a curse upon them so macabre that the details are recorded clearly in the sagas.

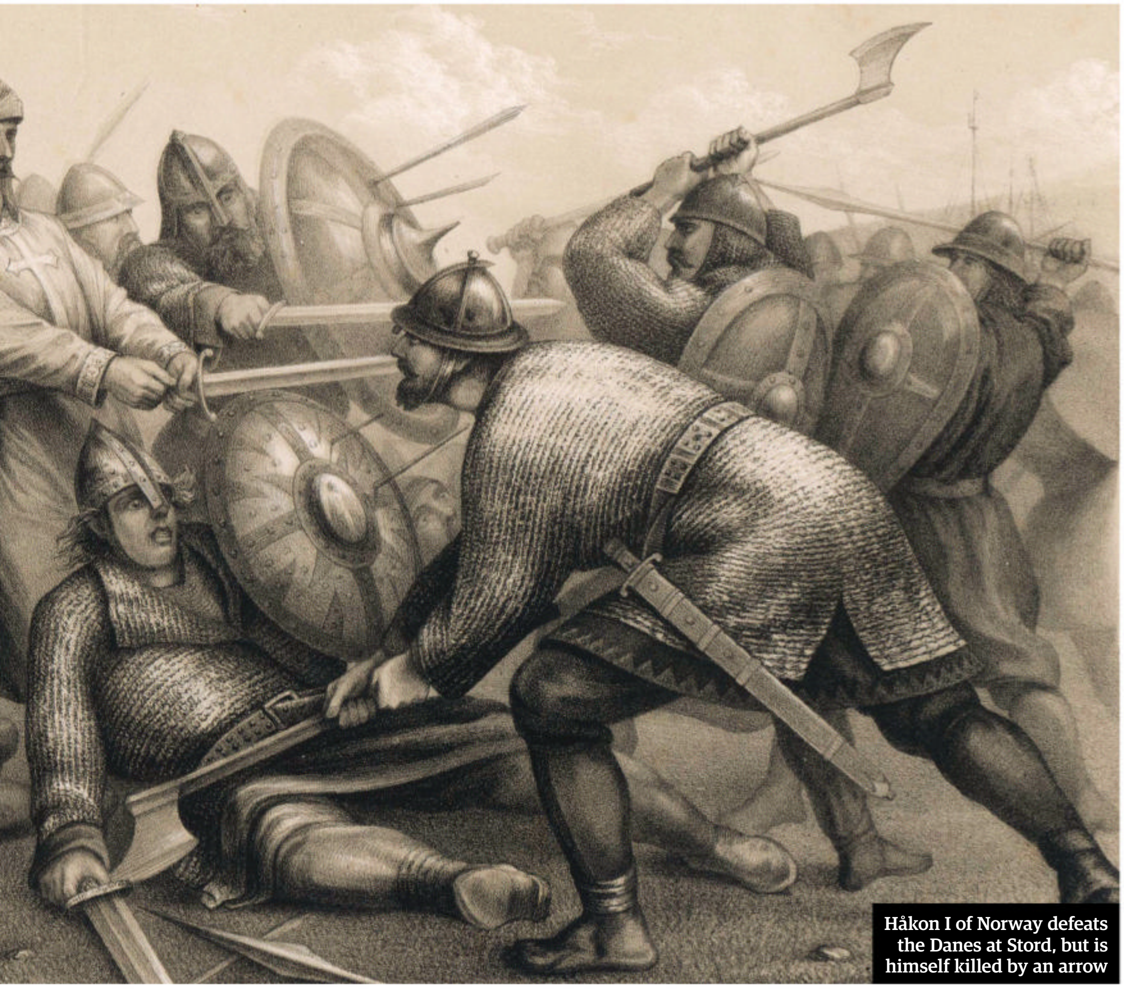
First of all, the sorcerer Egil set himself at the top of a headland, facing the raging seas below. Next, he took a hazel staff and cut runes into the shaft in a manner reserved only for the direst of situations. He fixed the pole in the ground, securing the severed head of a horse on top, pointing it towards the waves. Swiftly, he turned the head to face where Gunnhild and Erik lay, and screamed out a curse to the sky, that the guardian spirits of the land should drive them out of Norway as punishment for Gunnhild’s workings against him. Legend tells that this curse took hold of Erik and Gunnhild, with the fates now leading them down a spiraling path of disaster that would ultimately lead to Erik’s death.

A year after King Harald Fairhair died, his son Håkon – later known as Håkon the Good – heard news of Erik’s tyranny in Norway, and set sail from England to challenge him. It was a turbulent voyage across fierce seas, and soon a message reached Norway that Håkon was lost at sea. Yet Gunnhild stood firm, resolutely telling Erik that Håkon was alive. Gunnhild was viewed with suspicion and accused of sorcery, for she could not have known of Håkon’s fate, other than through witchcraft. Indeed, Gunnhild’s words were true, for Håkon soon returned. By the summer months, Norway’s jarls had risen up to make Håkon their

This box brooch was found in the grave of a Viking witch, or Völva, dating from c. 980



An imagination of Gunnhild as an old woman



Håkon I of Norway defeats the Danes at Stord, but is himself killed by an arrow

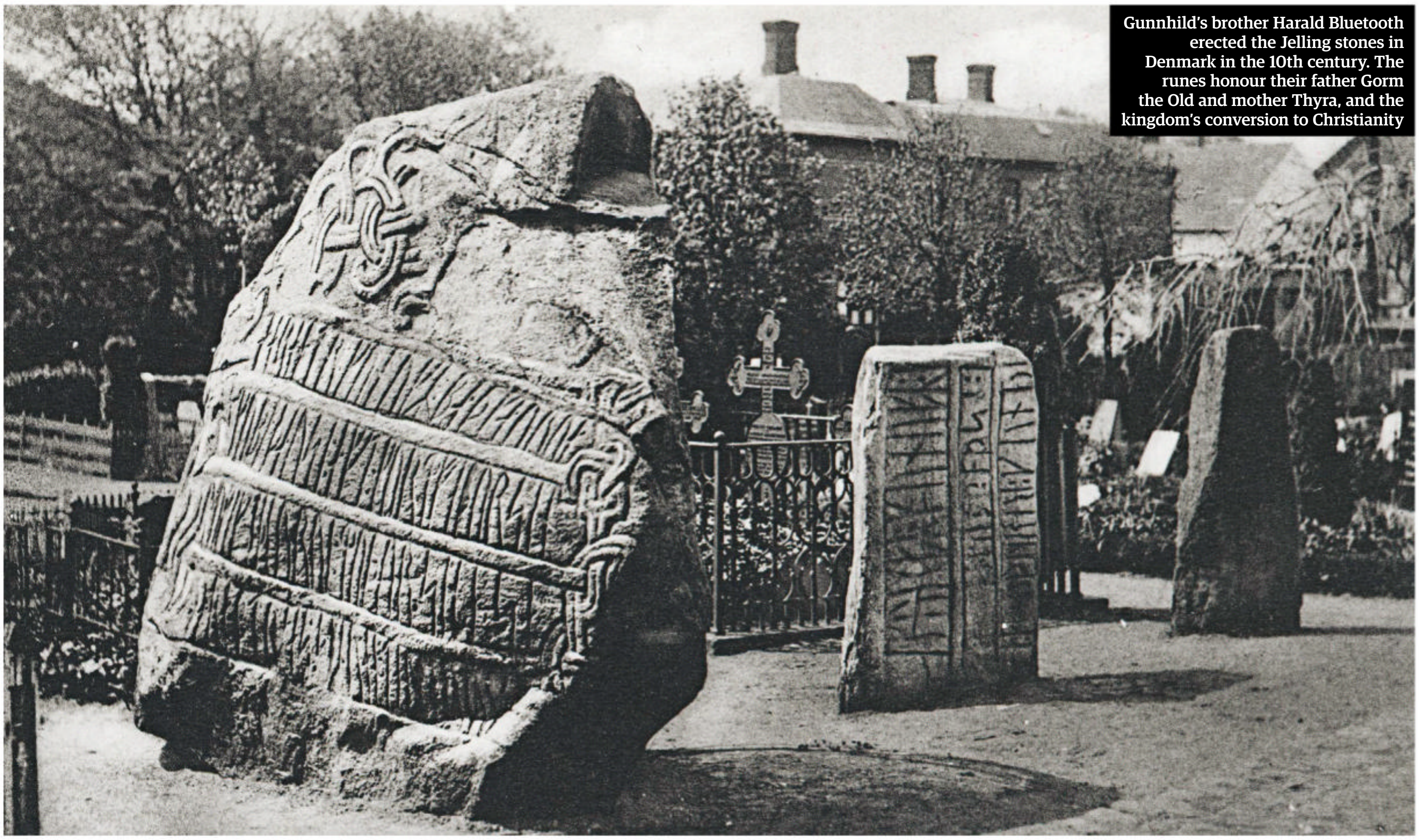
Power and Sex in the Sagas

Gunnhild takes a lover, yet ends it with a curse

Like in other areas of her life, Gunnhild wielded her sexual prowess as a weapon. After Erik's death, Gunnhild took a younger lover and made no secret of it. Hrut, a young Icelander, caught Gunnhild's eye when he arrived from the west by boat, armed with the task of pursuing a man named Soti who had taken his inheritance. Gunnhild unabashedly offered her help with his plight, suggesting that he and his friend Ozur stay with her over the winter. Being patroned by a powerful Viking queen like Gunnhild changed the course of Hrut's life forever.

While we see other women in the sagas shrinking away from their men's rough embraces, Gunnhild breaks convention by flaunting her affair with Hrut, kissing and embracing him in public. She even spent two whole weeks with him, both sleeping each night locked together in her bedchamber. While she didn't mind engaging in her affair openly, *Njál's Saga* does show her threatening the guards that if they spoke of the relationship she would have them put to death. Most scandalous of all in the eyes of her contemporaries was the age difference between them: Gunnhild was a generation older than Hrut, yet this didn't bother either of them. That was until Hrut set out to pursue Soti to Denmark, with the gift of two longboats from Gunnhild. On his return, Gunnhild noticed that Hrut had grown quieter. She questioned him about having found another lover while away. Hrut protested, and denied it, yet soon requested leave from King Harald Greycloak that he should return to Iceland. Before he left Gunnhild gave him a gift: a fine gold bangle, which she placed on his arm with her own hands. She leaned in to whisper her parting words: a spell. She cursed Hrut that he would have no pleasure with the woman he secretly intended to marry in Iceland.

On his marriage to Unn, he found that he was not impotent, but instead hyper-potent. The sagas labour the point with the warrior kennings used for Hrut: spear-sharpener and bow-bender are just two of these, and the irony cannot escape us that the name 'Hrut' itself means ram. Unn finally confided in her father that "there's a spell on his spindle". Like many fathers would, he advised that she should fain illness, while taking other men to her bed. Only then should she proclaim a divorce. On Hrut's return, he found his wife gone. Gunnhild had won her revenge; her spell against him had worked.

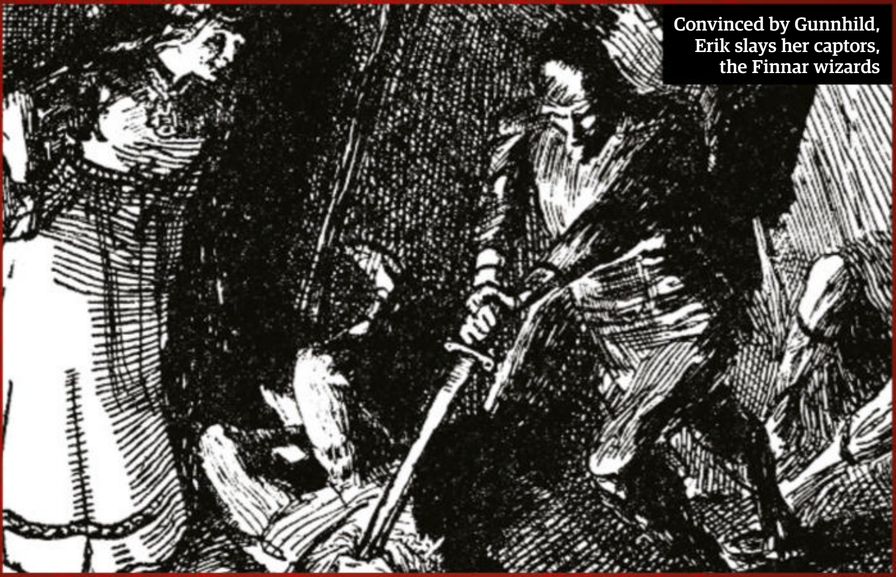


Gunnhild's brother Harald Bluetooth erected the Jelling stones in Denmark in the 10th century. The runes honour their father Gorm the Old and mother Thyra, and the kingdom's conversion to Christianity

Magic of the Finnar

The dark northern magic of Gunnhild

It is no secret that Gunnhild was said to have learned magic from Finnar wizards in the cold north of the country. At that time, the Norse writers didn't distinguish between Finns and Sàmi peoples, but regarded both as uncivilised, malicious and magical inhabitants of the sinister north. Throughout the sagas we see an inherent prejudice against these people. While their land was once seen as sacred, with the coming of Christianity, it became known as an unholy place, and we can only assume that the tales were peppered with a post-colonial prejudice based on hearsay and rumour. The north became a place of unhallowed mystery, where heroes only went to test themselves, and areas like Hálogaland became synonymous with the origins of the saga's greatest villains, including Gunnhild. To contemporary northern people, your homeland said much about the type of person you were; for Gunnhild, legends of her northern origins and knowledge of Finnar magic were meant as a slur upon her character, setting the scene for later misrule. Examples of Finnar magic are a frequent theme in contemporary writing, and here are just a few examples of the type of magic a Finnar wizard might be said to use.



Convinced by Gunnhild, Erik slays her captors, the Finnar wizards

The scout

In the *Saga Of King Olaf Tryggvason*, Harald Bluetooth charges a wizard to act as a scout. The wizard changes into a whale and finds that the land is guarded by four landvættir (nature spirits): a dragon, an eagle, a bull and a giant.

The navigator

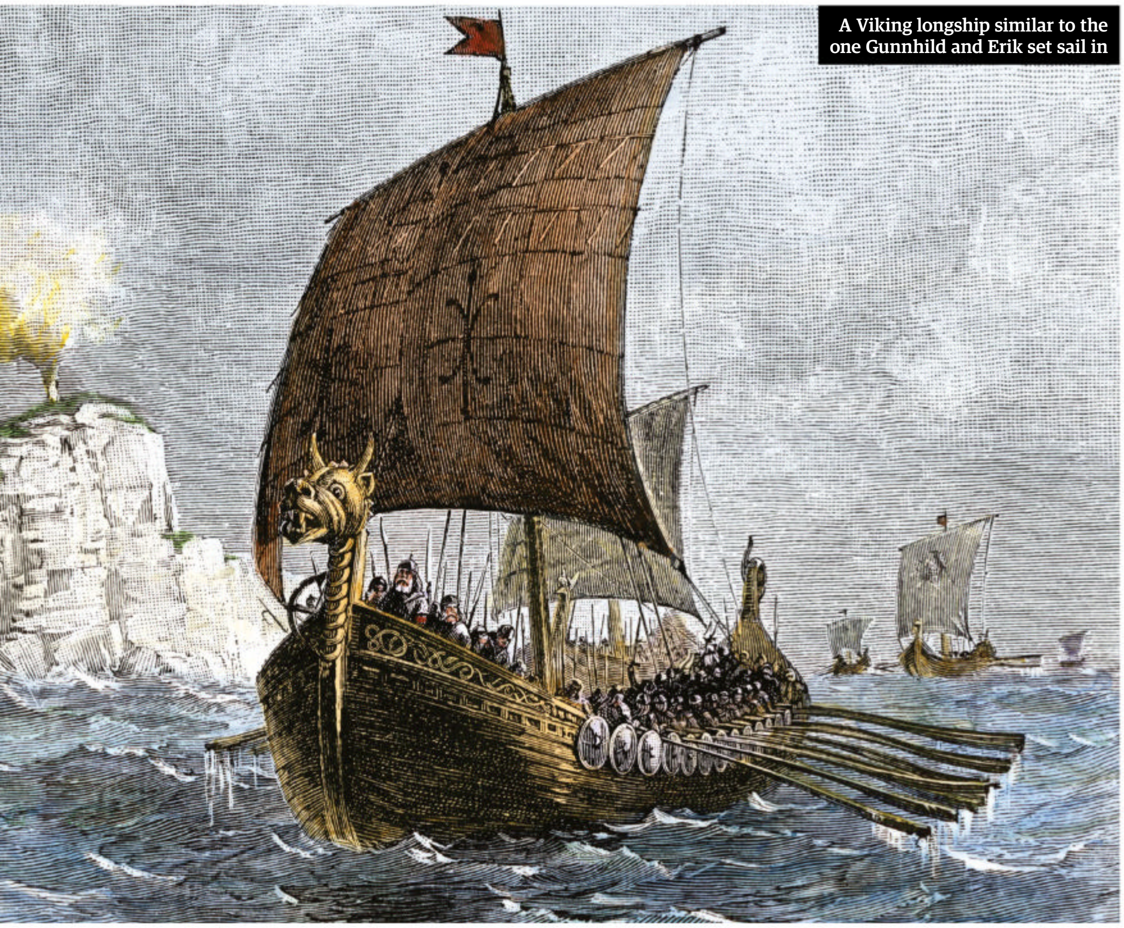
Saxo Grammaticus describes the Finnar as proficient in navigating the twists and turns of ice-covered peaks. They reportedly drop pebbles and snow as they go, turning them into great mountains and raging rivers to aid their retreat.

The shape-shifter

Able to take the form of wild creatures, in *Hálfdanar Saga Eysteinssonar*, one wizard takes on the form of a walrus and can kill fifteen men.

The searchers

In *Vatnsdaela Saga*, a 13th-century Icelandic text, a sorceress tells the boy Ingimundr that he will travel to Iceland one day and find an amulet he has lost. Ingimundr decides to investigate her claims and calls on three men from the north. He tells them he will give them butter in a tin if they go to Iceland on his behalf, find his amulet and describe the land there for him. The wizards instruct him to lock them in a shed and not reveal their names. After three nights they have an answer for him. They describe how they found the amulet at a place where three fjords meet, but state that each time they tried to take hold of the amulet it flew away from them. This is a classic tale of Finnar magic, where the wizard goes on a fact-finding mission in spirit.



A Viking longship similar to the one Gunnhild and Erik set sail in

> “Erik decreed that Egil should be killed the next morning”

Viking coins citing the king at the time have been found across Europe

king. Gunnhild and Erik could do nothing, and they fled to Orkney with their children, where Erik was accepted as king.

Here, accounts of events become murky. Some say that Erik and Gunnhild were offered the seat of Northumbria by King Æthelstan, ruler of the bulk of England not under Viking dominance. This seems unlikely, as he was the foster father of Håkon and had sent the prince home to reclaim his throne. Other accounts say Wulstan, Bishop of York, sent the invite, yet others claim that when the royal couple reached English shores Erik died and left Gunnhild to her fate. According to the Icelandic sagas, after harrying along the north-eastern coast and wreaking havoc along their path, Gunnhild and Erik made their home in York in 952 and the family was baptised into Christianity.

Gunnhild’s fury had not abated with their journey; she still blamed Egil for their fall. She set to work a spell against him, that he should find no peace in Iceland until she had seen him. A year later Egil set sail for England to see King Æthelstan. Gunnhild’s curse wrapped its fingers around Egil’s fate: he was shipwrecked, and the storm brought him directly to the shores of Gunnhild’s lands in Northumbria. Realising that he could not escape, Egil went to Erik and Gunnhild, imploring them to be reconciled. Gunnhild’s anger was not to be turned. Erik decreed that Egil should be killed the next morning. Egil did not spend his last night idly; instead, he worked until daybreak to compose a great poem in tribute to King Erik, in hope that it might win him his life. It did.

Gunnhild and Erik lived on in Northumbria until around 954, when their seat was threatened as a wave of political upheaval fell over England. Erik chose to leave Northumbria, becoming a scourge of terror across the country, before he was finally stopped by the English at the Battle of Stainmore with his death closing the book on Viking rule in the north of the country.

When this news reached Gunnhild, life as she knew it ended: the people of England blamed her for the bloodshed that Erik had rained on them. She gathered her wits, drawing all their possessions and wealth together, before fleeing, once more, to Orkney with all the men and ships they could muster. Thorfinn Skullcleaver, Earl of Orkney, made them welcome, and Gunnhild and her sons took power there for a while, until they heard news from Harald Bluetooth, Gunnhild’s brother and King of Denmark, that he was displeased with King Håkon, concluding that they might at last be able to return home to Norway. She married her daughter Ragnhildr to Thorfinn to form an alliance in Orkney and took refuge with Harald Bluetooth, where he gave them lands to support them.

Gunnhild stayed in Denmark for many years while her sons tried to win back their father’s lands from King Håkon. It seemed that Egil’s curse against them was finally losing power when they mustered a considerable army against him and won a great victory in the Battle of Fitjar in 961. Their enemy, Håkon, was mortally wounded with what was said to be an arrow to the shoulder and there were once more whisperings that it was her dark magic that had won them both the day and the Kingdom of Norway. Gunnhild revelled in her position when her son, Harald Greycloak, came into power, and she had much sway in the government of the country; it was at this point she was given the title Mother of Kings.

Gunnhild’s tempestuous rule ended when her own brother, Harald Bluetooth, turned against them in 971, scheming with the noblemen of Norway to kill Harald Greycloak, her son. Now an elderly woman, Gunnhild fled to her daughter in Orkney with her family once more, where they ruled until the men under her influence were dead.

If ending as a wife and mother who outlived both her husband and her sons was not cruel fate enough, six years later in 977, Harald Bluetooth dealt her one final blow: he decreed that, for her wickedness, she should be thrown into a bog and drowned. Gunnhild was killed at the hands of her own kin.

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Joan of Navarre, the Royal Witch

Explore the life of Joan of Navarre, Queen of England, the treasonous witchcraft accusations against her and how not all was as it seemed

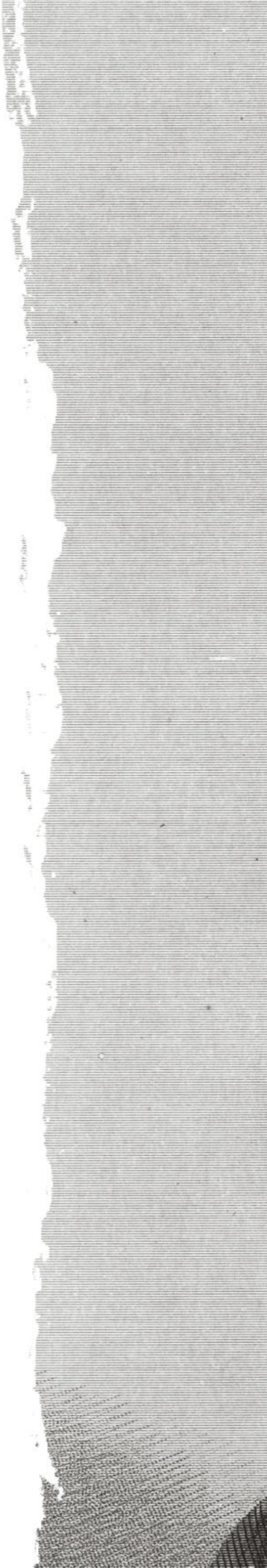
You would be forgiven for not knowing the story of Joan of Navarre, Queen of England. She has been overshadowed in comparison to the more 'popular' female monarchs, such as the wives of Henry VIII or his daughters, despite the fact that Joan was accused of sorcery, witchcraft and conspiracy to poison the king, her own stepson Henry V. Her tale is one of love, loss, manipulation and above all, injustice. So, just how did Joan become the only queen of England to be imprisoned for witchcraft?

Joan and her brothers spent a short time as hostages in Paris to secure the good behaviour of her father, Charles II

Born in 1368, she was the daughter of the King of Navarre, Charles II, also known as 'Charles the Bad' and Jeanne de Valois. We know little about Joan's childhood, although records for the monastery of Santa Clara in Navarre show that it received a florin a day for her care. Of course, royal daughters were supposed to be the pawns in the game of marital diplomacy and Joan was quickly betrothed to the heir of Castile, Juan, at the age of 12. Negotiations eventually fell through and Joan married John IV, Duke of Brittany in 1386, receiving a generous dower from the duchy.

Joan's marriage to John was successful and by all accounts happy. Together the couple had eight children with seven surviving into adulthood. For the Duke, the arrival of heirs after years of trying with his previous two wives must have come as a huge relief and Joan certainly achieved her task. Being continuously pregnant for a decade prevented the Duchess from playing much of a role in Breton politics, but this changed following her husband's death in 1399. Joan initially became the regent for the duchy on behalf of their son John V, who was only ten years old at this point. She proved effective, resolving some of the internal conflict that had been prevalent during her husband's rule.

Here is where Joan's life takes a unique turn. Three years after the death of her husband, Joan opened up secret negotiations to arrange her own marriage to King Henry IV of England, which was an unprecedented action for a widow at the



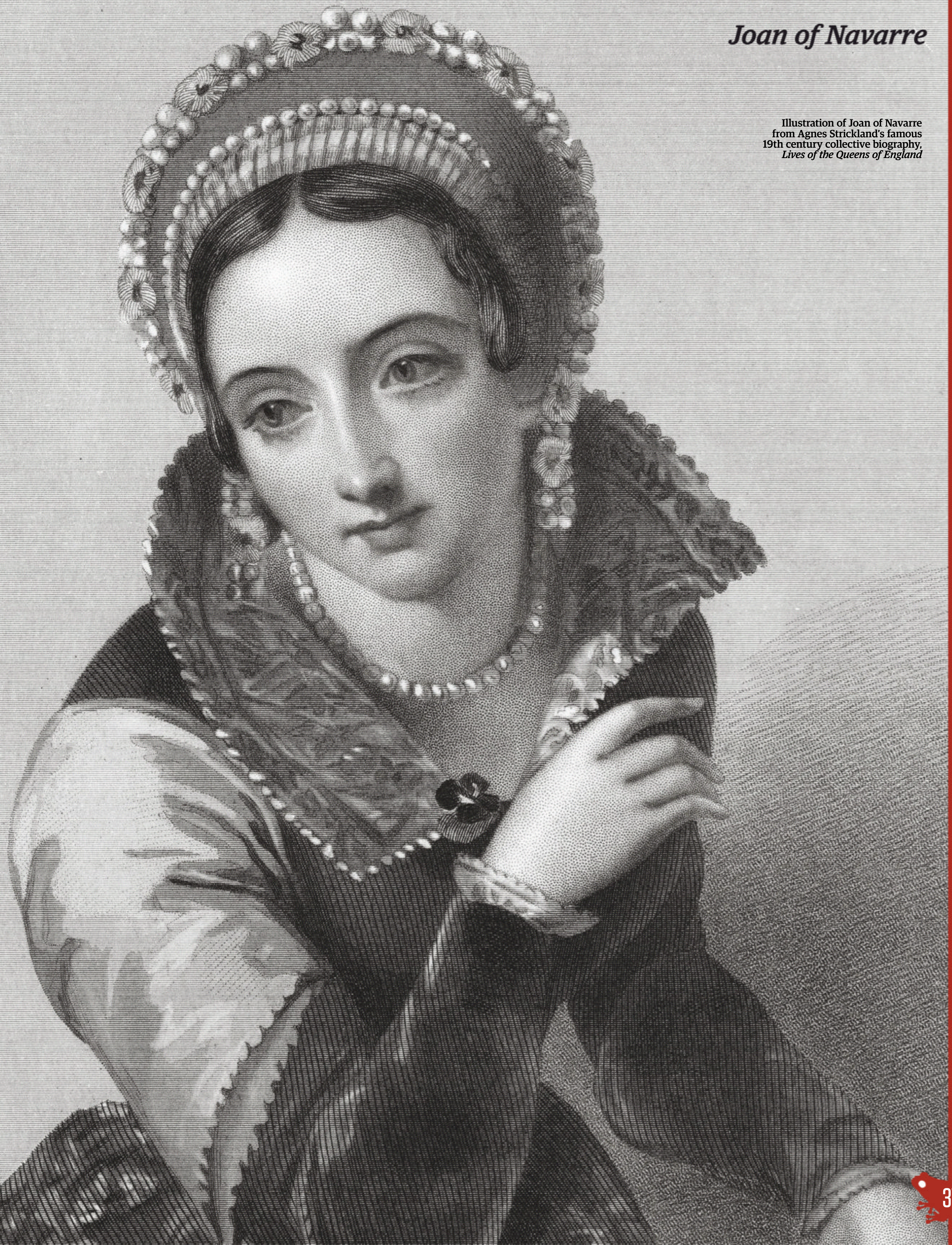


Illustration of Joan of Navarre from Agnes Strickland's famous 19th century collective biography, *Lives of the Queens of England* time. Joan and Henry had already met previously, before the death of John and Henry's accession to the English throne. It is likely that this initial meeting had fostered an affection between the two, which contributed to their decision to marry. Unsurprisingly, their marriage took many people by surprise and led them to question the king's logic. Joan brought no real advantages with her when she married Henry – no money and no diplomatic connections that were deemed worthy enough for her position as the king's new queen.

On the other hand, Joan gained a lot through her new marriage. Her new marriage dower was the largest that had ever been bestowed on a queen of England at this point, at 10,000 marks a year. She maintained a large household in her new home which was full of Breton foreigners, which ultimately caused enough friction with parliament that they were all dismissed. The prestige of her new position as queen was a step up from her previous role as a duchess. There was also no pressure for her to provide a new husband with heirs, because Henry already had four legitimate sons. As for her own children, Joan brought her two daughters with her to England and transferred the regency of Brittany to her uncle, the Duke of Burgundy. Contemporaries noted that the new queen was an attractive, kind woman who appeared to have a stable and friendly relationship with her step-family.

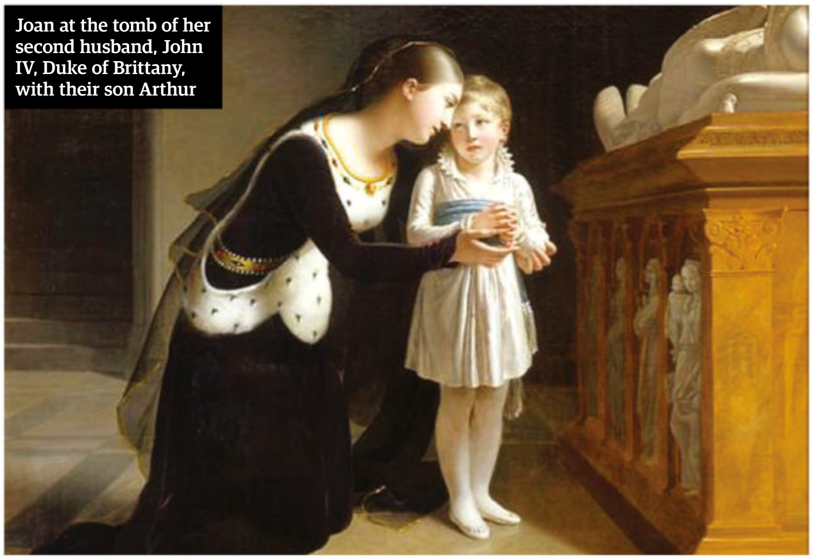
It is therefore unsurprising that Joan decided to remain in England after Henry's death in 1413. She still received her large dower, although admittedly parliament had defaulted on its payment numerous times. She continued to indulge in her love for fine clothing, jewellery, expensive spices, food and wine, living in comfort in her adopted country. Her relationship with the new king, Henry V, was in a good place even after the Battle of Agincourt in 1415. It may have been Henry's greatest military victory, but the battle also saw Joan's own son seriously injured and the death of her son-in-law. Despite this the dowager queen never made a complaint against her stepson and everything carried on as usual.

Then all of a sudden everything changed. In 1419 Joan's confessor, Father John Randolph, and two other members of her household accused the dowager queen of conspiring to kill the king through the dark arts of sorcery, witchcraft and poison. As a result Joan was arrested for treason, her possessions were seized and she was subsequently held prisoner in numerous locations for the next three years, eventually settling at Pevensey Castle and later on Leeds Castle. Randolph found himself accused of tempting the queen into witchcraft and was imprisoned in the Tower of London – he died there in 1429, after getting into a fight with a mad man.

A papal dispensation was required to marry Henry IV within the fourth degree of consanguinity

In some cases, just a whisper of witchcraft was enough to turn the life of the accused upside down, and cause them to live in fear. It is strange then to think that, despite what she was accused of, Joan spent her time under house arrest in relative comfort. She was not ostracised as you would expect, which is clear from the fact that she received visits from members of high society such as Henry Beaufort, Bishop of Winchester and Lord Camoys. Even her stepson and Henry's own brother, Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, took the time to visit his stepmother. The account books for her household during her imprisonment show that Joan essentially continued her luxurious life, just on a far smaller scale. She still maintained a number of servants and she even paid for the upkeep of her stable – suggesting that Joan was allowed to go riding. It would seem that rather than being placed under house arrest, the dowager queen was simply being confined by the king. Considering this, was Joan really guilty of witchcraft?

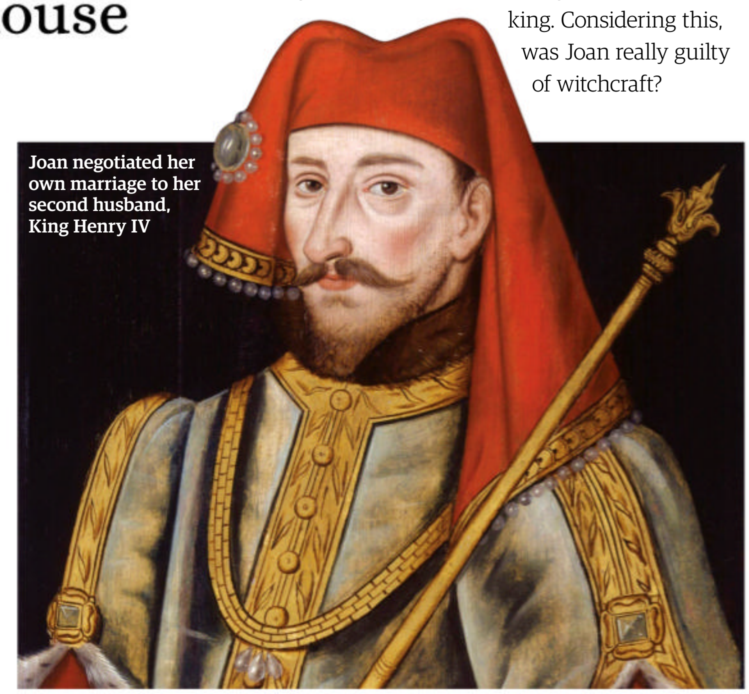
"Despite what she was accused of, Joan spent her time under house arrest in relative comfort"


Joan at the tomb of her second husband, John IV, Duke of Brittany, with their son Arthur

Defining moment

Death of the duke, 1 November 1399

Joan's first husband John passed away, leaving the regency of the duchy to her. Interestingly, John had included in his will that Joan was to continue receiving her marriage dower for the rest of her life. However, just like with her English dower, Joan struggled to get the money owed to her, particularly after her move to England.


Joan negotiated her own marriage to her second husband, King Henry IV

Defining moment

A royal wedding, 7 February 1403

After receiving a papal dispensation to marry within the fourth degree, Joan wed King Henry IV at Winchester Cathedral, after their initial marriage by proxy the year before. Almost three weeks later on the 26th, Joan was officially crowned as queen of England. Just like her first marriage, Joan's relationship with the king seemed to be loving and happy.

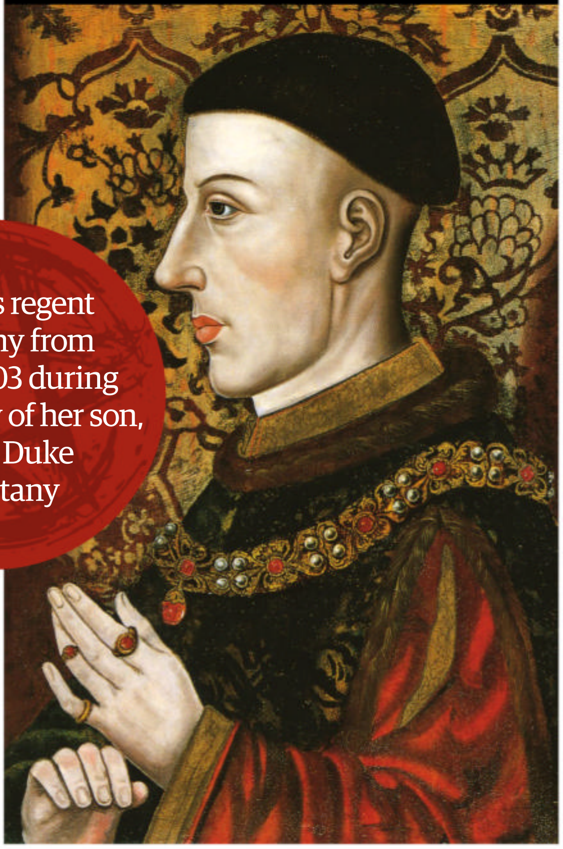
The treatment of Joan in comparison to Humphrey's wife, Eleanor Cobham, Duchess of Gloucester, who would be accused of witchcraft and necromancy against King Henry VI just over two decades later, really highlights how false these charges against Joan were. Eleanor was tried and found guilty, forced to divorce Humphrey, sentenced to life imprisonment and to do a humiliating public penance throughout London. On the other hand, Joan never experienced such punishment let alone an actual trial. Today the idea of witchcraft may seem laughable but before, during and after Joan's lifetime it was seen as a genuine and terrifying threat. If, for a single second, Henry truly believed that his stepmother had used witchcraft to try and harm him then he would have punished her immediately. Indeed, there was no evidence other than Randolph's testimony that justified the serious accusations against her. Clearly, the entire situation was a joke.

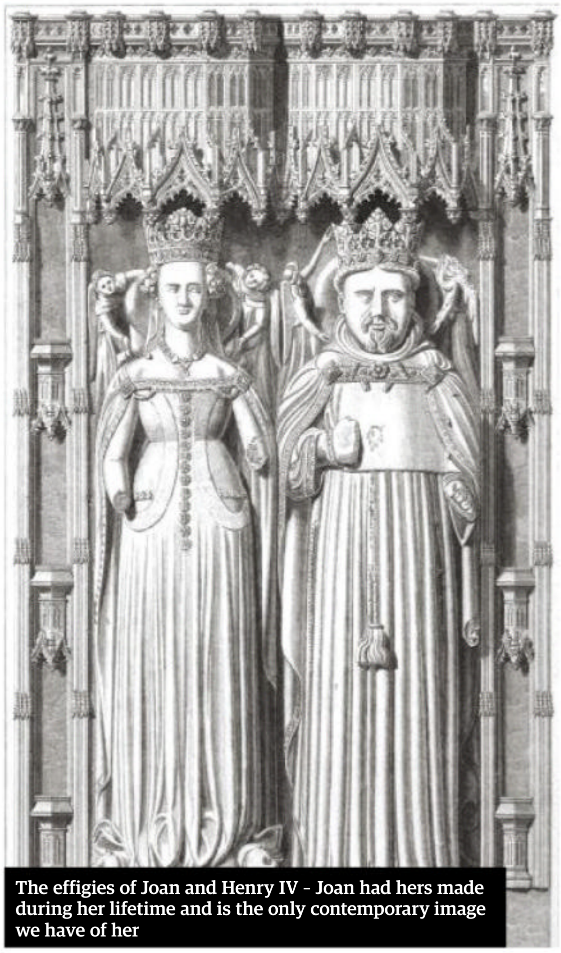
This leads us to the question that, if there was no real evidence behind the witchcraft accusations levelled at Joan, why was she accused in the first place? Although Henry had experienced success with his military campaigns abroad, they were very expensive. The king was desperate to raise more money and his stepmother had a lot of it, thanks to her dower and lands given to her by his father. Following the accusations of witchcraft Joan was stripped of these possessions, which defaulted to the crown and straight into the royal coffers. Henry had found the perfect, legitimate way to snatch Joan's money and she could not do a thing about it, although she did not complain either - perhaps she understood why he behaved this way? He certainly could not let her go to trial and be found innocent, as he would be forced to restore her belongings.

This situation was not a unique occurrence, with witchcraft accusations a common practice during this period. Denouncing a woman as a witch was a sinister and devious way to remove her from a position of power and take her wealth. Luckily for Joan, King Henry appeared to have had an attack of conscience while lying on his deathbed. Just before he passed away in 1422, Henry ordered Joan's release and declared that her dower and possessions be restored to her. This was easier said than done, with Joan spending the majority of her time trying to reclaim what rightfully belonged to her, as some of her land had been granted to others during the period of her imprisonment. However, considering what may have happened to Joan, had she been tried and found guilty, this is definitely the lesser of two evils.

Joan was regent of Brittany from 1399 to 1403 during the minority of her son, John V, Duke of Brittany

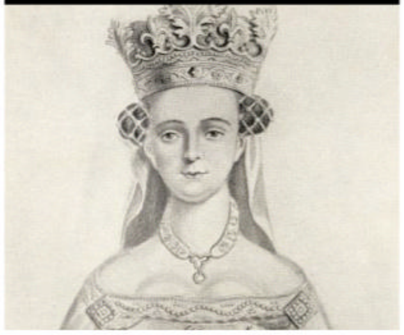
King Henry V, Joan's stepson, who imprisoned her for three years following accusations of witchcraft and treason





The effigies of Joan and Henry IV - Joan had hers made during her lifetime and is the only contemporary image we have of her

Joan may have gotten on well with the royal family, but many in England treated her with suspicion



The Reputation of Queen Joan

What did contemporaries think of her?

Today, modern historians agree that the charges of treason and witchcraft brought against Joan were a complete lie, made up by the king to deprive her of the wealth she was due. This does not mean that Joan's contemporaries took the same view of their dowager queen – in fact, many denounced her for her so-called use of sorcery, witchcraft and necromancy.

It is worth noting that, although Joan was likeable enough, some considered that the charges of witchcraft made against her were entirely possible. As a foreigner who brought nothing to the table with her marriage, Joan was treated with suspicion and her marriage was initially unpopular. Of course, this is a situation that a number of foreign royal spouses have experienced throughout history. However, Joan's lineage also gave cause for concern. Her father, Charles the Bad, was also accused of being a sorcerer during his reign and so it was not unreasonable to think that the apple did not fall far from the tree.

Having said this, in comparison to later queens, such as Margaret of Anjou and Elizabeth Woodville, Joan's reputation has not suffered quite to extent that theirs did thanks to accusations of witchcraft. Nevertheless, Joan has still undergone a period of rehabilitation thanks to renewed scholarship on her lifetime.

Nothing remains of Langley Manor today except for archaeological remains

Defining moment

Up in flames, March 1431

By the reign of her step-grandson, King Henry VI, Joan was a senior member of the Lancastrians but also further away in terms of her proximity to the crown. Wary of being taken advantage of, Joan semi-retired to her home at Langley. Sadly, because of staff negligence the house burnt down, a low point in Joan's later life.

© Alamy, Getty Images

Betrayal of the Knights Templar

In seven years the Order was hunted, dismantled and executed. Was this justice for their sacrilegious practices, or were they the victims of a twisted plot?

Jacques de Molay was calm. Through seven long years of accusations, trials, torture, denials and confessions, he had been anything but calm, but as the frail, bearded man was led out onto the Île aux Juifs on the Seine, he did not weep or tremble. A crowd had gathered to watch the old man die, and a pyre had been erected on the small island, ready to be lit and claim his soul. De Molay was stripped of the rags that were once clothes, down to his threadbare shirt, then the guards strapped his thin, pale body to the stake. Finally, the silent man spoke. He asked to be turned to face the cathedral of Notre Dame, and that his hands be freed so he could die in prayer. These requests were granted, and De Molay bowed his head in silent prayer as the pyre was lit. The flames grew fast, and as the tongues of fire lashed up around his body, he spoke once more, his voice rising above the crackle of the flames.

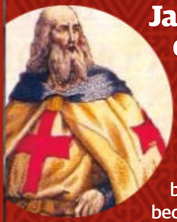
"God knows who is in the wrong and has sinned!" he proclaimed. "Misfortune will soon befall those who have wrongly condemned us; god will avenge our deaths. Make no mistake, all who are against us will suffer because of us!" The flames rose higher. "Pope Clement, King Philip - hear me now!" His voice roared. "Within a year you will answer for your crimes before the presence of god!" After these final words, De Molay fell silent, and the flames claimed his soul.

Before the year was over, Pope Clement and Philip IV were dead. Clement finally succumbed to a long illness on 20 April 1314, and the French king died after a hunting accident on 29 November 1314, aged just 46. De Molay's order was all but extinct, but the curse of the last grand master of the Knights Templar would live on in infamy.

Jacques de Molay's famous last words may not have actually been spoken by the grand master himself.

KEY FIGURES

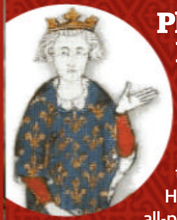
The men who destroyed the Order, and those who fought to defend it



Jacques de Molay

1243 – 18 MARCH 1314

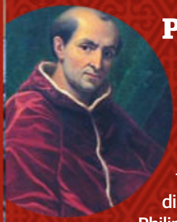
The 23rd and last grand master of the Knights Templar. Little is known of De Molay's early life, but he subsequently became the most well known Templar. He aimed to reform the Order, a goal he was never able to fulfil.



Philip IV of France

1268 – 29 NOVEMBER 1314

Also known as the Iron King, Philip led France from a feudal country to a centralised state. He had great belief in an all-powerful monarchy, and it was his ambition to fill thrones worldwide with his relatives. As well as destroying the Knights Templar, he also expelled Jews from France.



Pope Clement V

1264-1314

Born Raymond Bertrand de Got, Clement was made pope on 5 June 1305. There is some dispute over his loyalty to Philip IV, with some painting him as nothing but a tool for the French king, while others believing he showed surprising resistance. Either way, he is now remembered as the pope who suppressed the Knights Templar.

Guillaume de Nogaret

1260-1313

Keeper of the seal to Philip IV of France, Guillaume had previously played a role in the dispute between Philip and Pope Boniface; apparently persuading the king to kidnap the pope. He also had a central part in the fall of the Knights Templar, forcing members to give testimony against the Order.

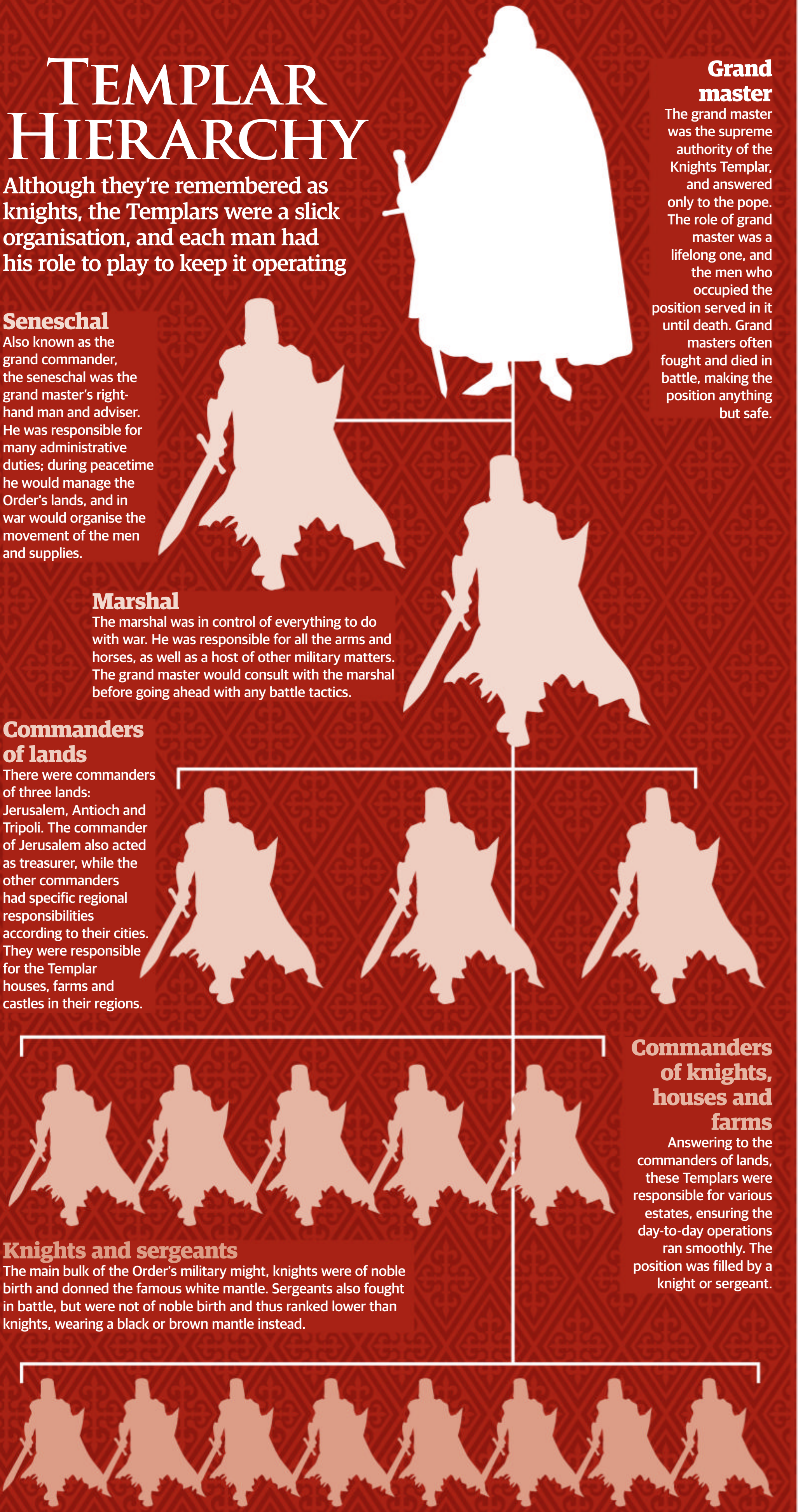
Geoffroi de Charney

UNKNOWN – 1314

Serving as preceptor of Normandy, Charney was a member of the Knights Templar from a young age and rose through the ranks. Like much of his order, he was arrested, tortured and confessed, then later retracted his statement. Charney was the only one of the three senior leaders arrested to rally by his master's side and deny the charges.

TEMPLAR HIERARCHY

Although they're remembered as knights, the Templars were a slick organisation, and each man had his role to play to keep it operating



Grand master

The grand master was the supreme authority of the Knights Templar, and answered only to the pope. The role of grand master was a lifelong one, and the men who occupied the position served in it until death. Grand masters often fought and died in battle, making the position anything but safe.

Seneschal

Also known as the grand commander, the seneschal was the grand master's right-hand man and adviser. He was responsible for many administrative duties; during peacetime he would manage the Order's lands, and in war would organise the movement of the men and supplies.

Marshal

The marshal was in control of everything to do with war. He was responsible for all the arms and horses, as well as a host of other military matters. The grand master would consult with the marshal before going ahead with any battle tactics.

Commanders of lands

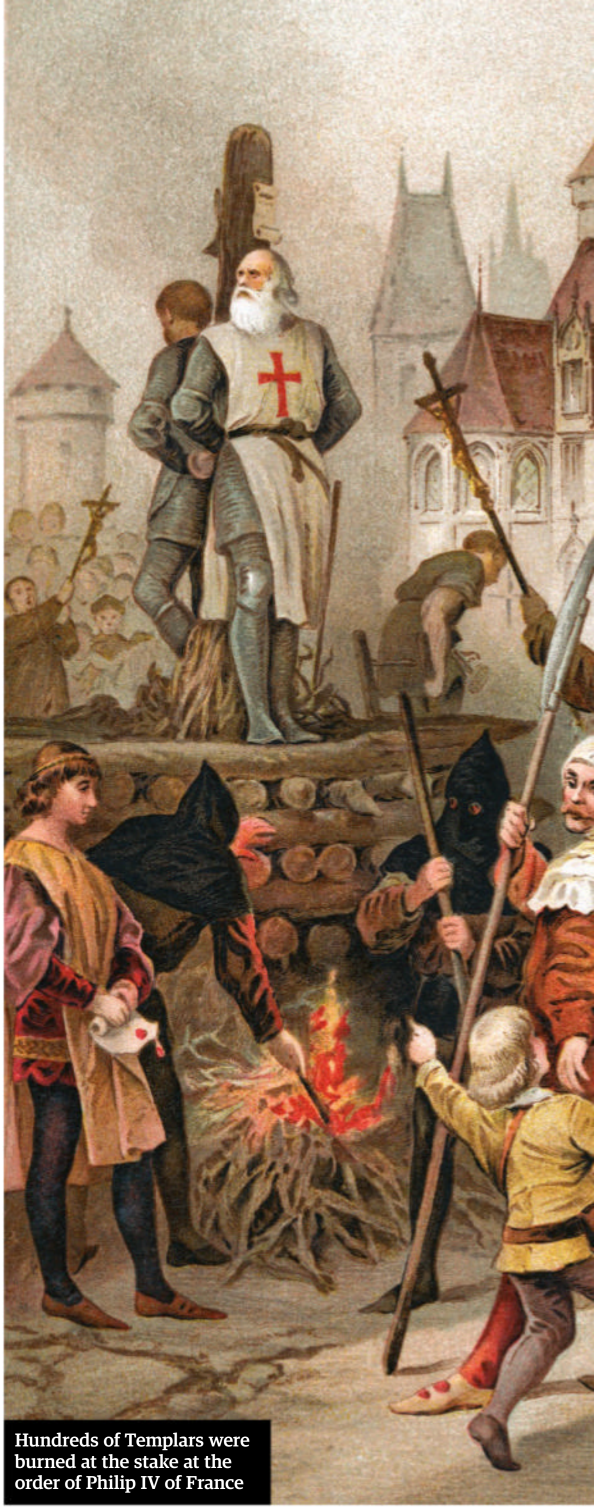
There were commanders of three lands: Jerusalem, Antioch and Tripoli. The commander of Jerusalem also acted as treasurer, while the other commanders had specific regional responsibilities according to their cities. They were responsible for the Templar houses, farms and castles in their regions.

Commanders of knights, houses and farms

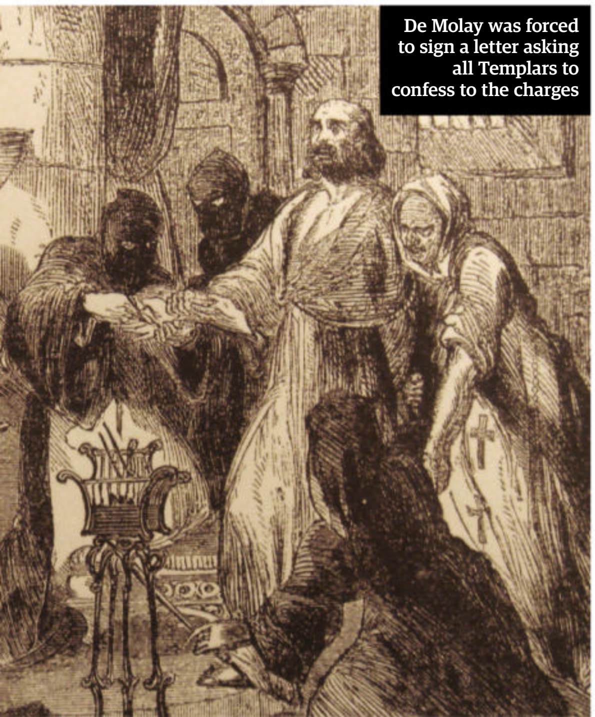
Answering to the commanders of lands, these Templars were responsible for various estates, ensuring the day-to-day operations ran smoothly. The position was filled by a knight or sergeant.

Knights and sergeants

The main bulk of the Order's military might, knights were of noble birth and donned the famous white mantle. Sergeants also fought in battle, but were not of noble birth and thus ranked lower than knights, wearing a black or brown mantle instead.



Hundreds of Templars were burned at the stake at the order of Philip IV of France



De Molay was forced to sign a letter asking all Templars to confess to the charges

Like so many aspects of the Knights Templar, they have been distorted by myth and legend, and today we just don't know if he cursed his betrayers with his dying breath. Thanks to their sudden and dramatic fall, an array of rumours, myths and conspiracies have persisted about the mysterious order, obscuring their true humble beginnings and devastating end that rocked 14th-century Europe.

After Jerusalem was captured by Christian forces in the First Crusade, many European pilgrims chose to make the journey to the Holy Land. However, this route was not safe for the Christians to travel along, so several knights charged themselves with protecting the roads from brigands. This guild of knights was founded on Christmas Day 1119 on the spot that marks the place where Jesus was crucified. As their headquarters were located on the Temple Mount, they became known as 'Knights of the Temple', or Knights Templar.

Although the Order began in virtual poverty, relying on donations to survive, they quickly became one of the most powerful monastic orders in the Medieval world. With papal approval, money, land and eager young noblemen poured into the Templars' resources. Serving as the West's first uniformed standing army in their white tunics emblazoned with a fiery red cross, the Templars achieved legendary status.

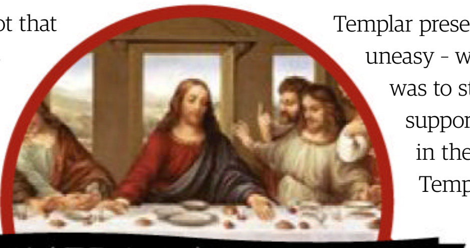
This reputation as god's warriors was encouraged by their victory at the Battle of Montgisard, where 500 Templars helped an army numbering a few thousand defeat 26,000 of Saladin's soldiers. As well as being a mighty military force, they also controlled a vast financial network, which has been recognised as the world's first modern banking system. Many nobles who wished to join the crusades placed their wealth under the control of the Templars, who then issued them with letters of credit. This could be used at Templar houses around the world to 'withdraw' their funds. By the 13th century, the Templars were one of the most powerful and wealthy organisations in the world, entirely unaware that a dramatic and terrible fate awaited them. However, it would not be the Muslims in the East who would bring about their downfall, but their fellow Christians in the West.

After the fall of Acre in 1291, the West lost its last Christian possessions in the Holy Land. The Templars were cast out from their origins and stripped of their raison d'être. When Jacques de Molay ascended as grand master in 1293, he had one goal in mind - to reclaim what the Templars had lost. De Molay travelled across the West to rustle up support; he received it from Pope Boniface and Edward I of England. But the crusade was a disaster, and De Molay lost 120 knights trying to land in Syria. In 1306, the Templars supported a coup in Cyprus that forced Henry II to abdicate in favour of his brother.

These actions did not go by unnoticed. Many monarchs in countries with powerful Templar presences began to feel uneasy - with their power, what was to stop the Templars supporting baron uprisings in their own countries? The Templars had also been very vocal in their desire to form their own state, similar to Prussia's Teutonic Knights and the Knights Hospitaller, another Catholic military order, in Rhodes.

In 1305, De Molay received a letter from Pope Clement V, then based in France, concerning the possibility of merging the Templars with the Hospitaller. De Molay was ardently against the idea, but in 1306 Clement invited both grand masters to France to discuss the issue further, instructing them to "come hither without delay, with as much secrecy as possible." De Molay arrived in 1307, but Foulques de Villaret, the leader of the Hospitaller, was either delayed or sensed something was amiss, as he did not arrive, and while the pope and De Molay waited, an entirely different subject of discussion was raised.

Two years previously, an ousted Templar had accused the Order of many criminal charges, and although they were generally believed to be false, King Philip IV of France had recently brought them back into discussion. De Molay, tiring of the ludicrous accusations, asked Clement to look into the matter to rid him of the whole messy situation. On 24 August, Clement wrote to Philip, saying that he did not believe the accusations but would start an inquiry "not without great sorrow, anxiety and upset of heart," and advised Philip to take no



TEMPLAR MYSTERIES

Holy Grail

The Holy Grail is perhaps the item that the Templars are most closely associated with. From Wolfram von Eschenbach's Medieval romance *Parzival* to Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code*, throughout history the Templars have been linked to the mysterious relic. Often in fiction the Templars are portrayed as the guardian of the cup that Jesus used in the Last Supper, or even a deep and dramatic secret. Interestingly, the city in which the Templars were launched, Troyes, is also the place that the very first grail romance was written. Any actual link between the Templars and the grail likely emerged due to the fact that stories of the grail began to become popular in the 12th and 13th century, when the Templars were at the height of their power. Although they were part of society, the Templars were shrouded in secrecy even in their day, so it is no wonder such a mysterious vessel was linked to the Order.

IN NUMBERS

20,000

members at their peak

54+

Templars burned to death in May 1310

15 witnesses gave evidence against the Order before 12 May 1310 – compared to 198 after

597

witnesses defended the Order before 12 May 1310 – compared to 14 after

9 knights were originally gathered to protect pilgrims

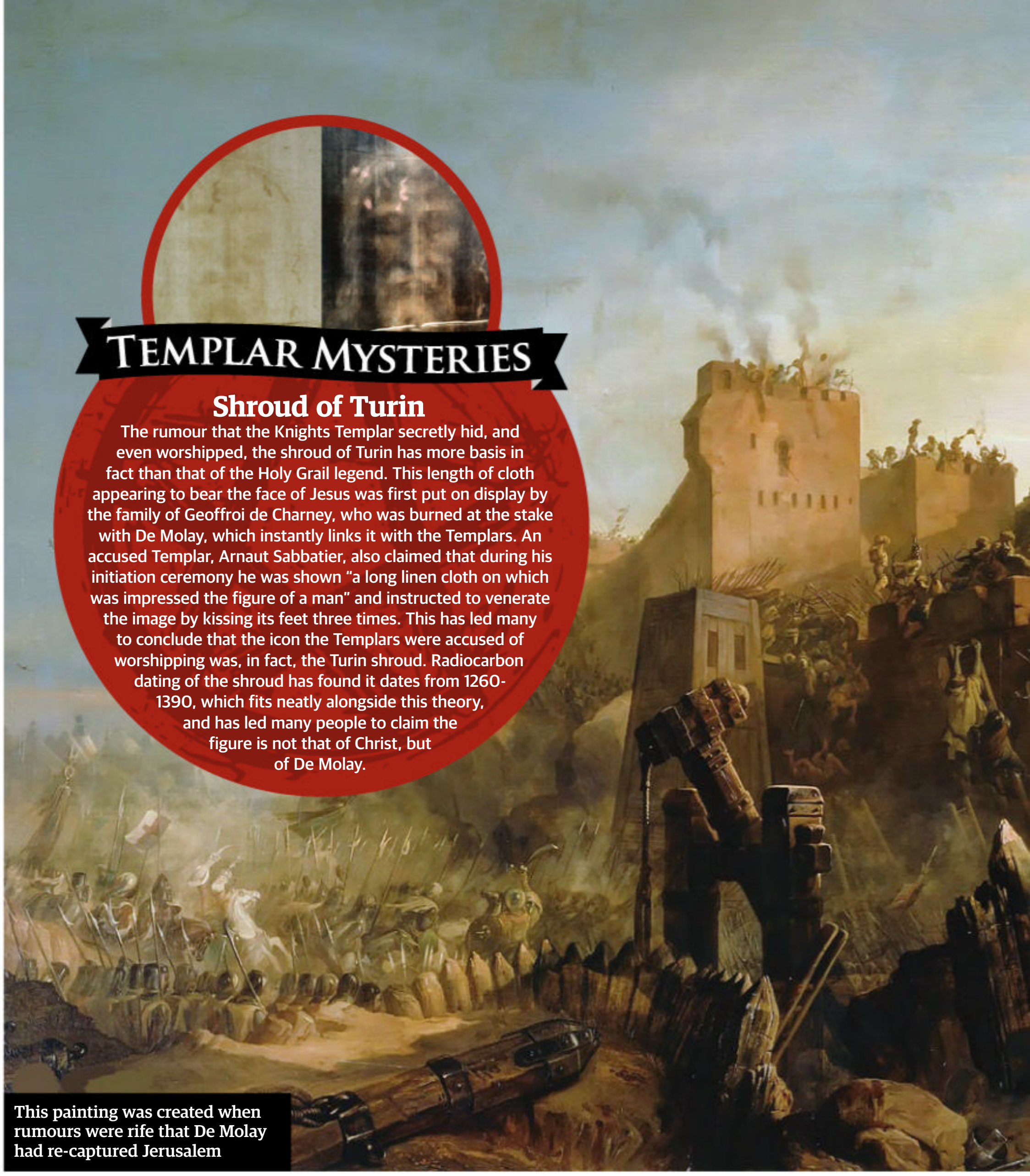
200,000

livres paid by the Knights Hospitallers to the French king as 'compensation'

TEMPLAR MYSTERIES

Shroud of Turin

The rumour that the Knights Templar secretly hid, and even worshipped, the shroud of Turin has more basis in fact than that of the Holy Grail legend. This length of cloth appearing to bear the face of Jesus was first put on display by the family of Geoffroi de Charney, who was burned at the stake with De Molay, which instantly links it with the Templars. An accused Templar, Arnaut Sabbatier, also claimed that during his initiation ceremony he was shown "a long linen cloth on which was impressed the figure of a man" and instructed to venerate the image by kissing its feet three times. This has led many to conclude that the icon the Templars were accused of worshipping was, in fact, the Turin shroud. Radiocarbon dating of the shroud has found it dates from 1260-1390, which fits neatly alongside this theory, and has led many people to claim the figure is not that of Christ, but of De Molay.



This painting was created when rumours were rife that De Molay had re-captured Jerusalem

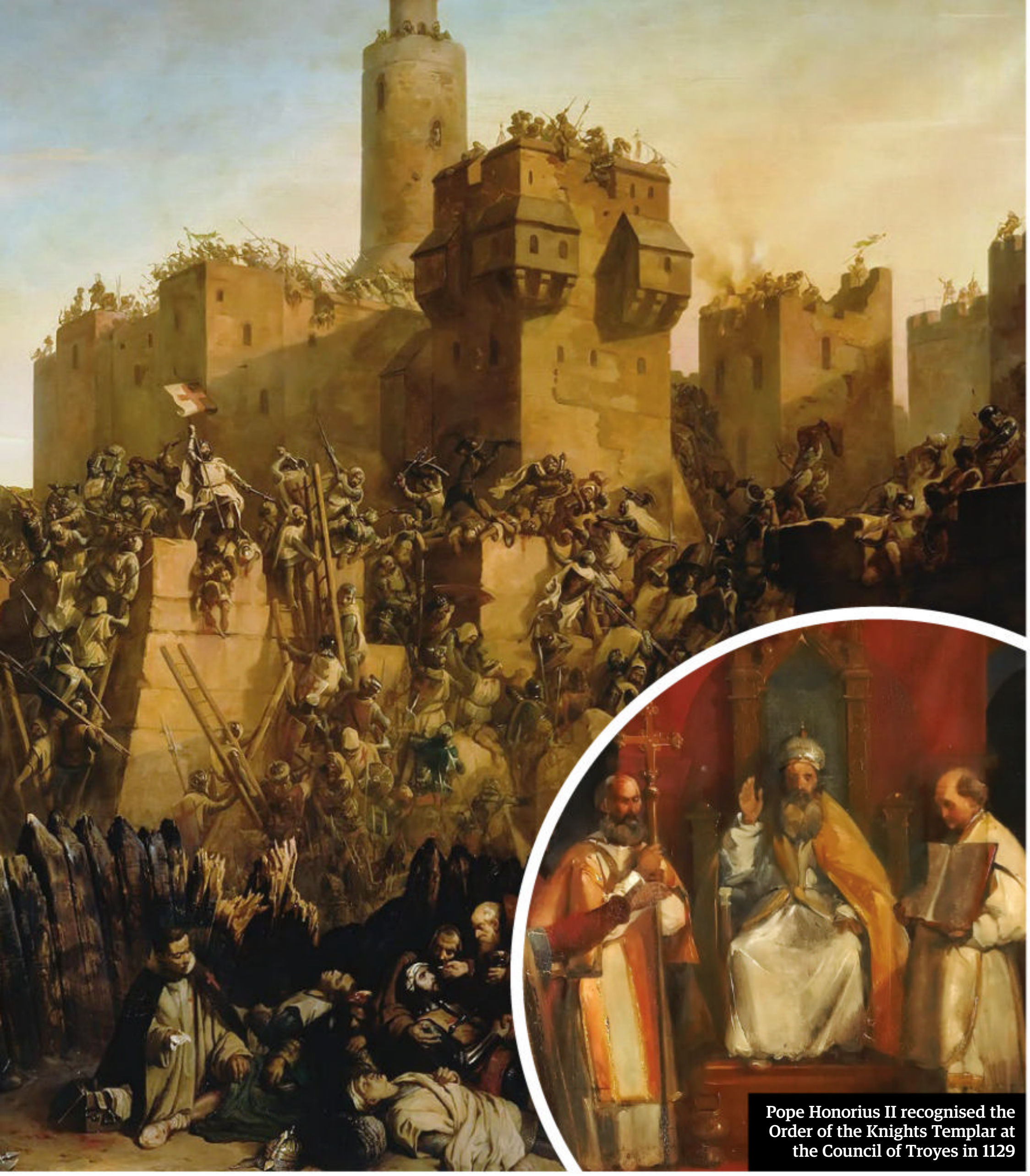
further action. Philip did not listen. At dawn on Friday 13 October, the king's forces arrested every Templar they could find in France.

Philip IV's harsh actions were not unprecedented; he had a reputation as a rash and violent king. Philip had previously clashed with Pope Boniface VIII, and launched an anti-papal campaign against him. Believing France should have centralised royal power, the feud escalated and ended with Philip attempting to kidnap the pope in 1303 to bring him to France to face charges of heresy. The shock ultimately killed Boniface, whose successor, Benedict XI, was then only in the position for nine months before his own death. This allowed the king to appoint his selection, Clement, to the papacy. Philip had also previously arrested wealthy Italian bankers in the city, stripping them of their assets; then his target switched to the Jews, who were thrown out of the kingdom. These actions can be easily explained – Philip had inherited a kingdom on the brink of financial crisis, and he also believed that his authority was above that of the pope. Not only did he owe the Templars a great deal of money, but their link to the church made them the perfect choice for establishing the power of the monarchy. With their plans to form their own state, the Order had basically sealed their own fate. The Templars had to fall for Philip to rise.

When the Templars in France were arrested, the charges put against them were heresy, sodomy, blasphemy and denying Christ. By charging them with heresy, Philip could paint himself as a soldier of Christ, similar to that of his sainted grandfather Louis IX. But his actions were a violation of the church in Rome's orders, and Clement was furious. Philip had likely believed the pope to be a frail and infirm old man and certainly not a threat, but Clement wrote angrily to Philip, accusing him of violating every rule in this "act of contempt towards the Roman Church."

This did little to help the brothers of the temple. Some 15,000 Templars now resided in the prisons of France, many of whom were not nobles or knights, but mere farmers and shepherds. De Molay didn't escape capture either; just a day after acting as pallbearer at the funeral of the king's sister-in-law, the grand master was arrested along with the rest of his order. Philip seized their land and property and set about obtaining the confessions he needed to smash the Order to pieces.

There was one simple way of acquiring confessions, and Philip employed it to great success: torture. His inquisitors utilised a variety of horrific and demoralising methods to break the men's wills. The rack, which stretched a victim's body and dislocated his joints, was frequently used, as was strappado, which involved binding a victim's hands with rope that ran up a pulley, raising him in the air, then dropping him rapidly. The soles of prisoners' feet were greased then set alight with flame and teeth were pulled. They were confined to cold, dark cells, and those who did not survive the torture were secretly buried. One anonymous writer in 1308 wrote of the conditions in the cells: "The human tongue cannot express the punishment, afflictions, miseries, taunts, and dire kinds of torture suffered by the said innocents in the space of three months, since the day of their arrest, since by day and night constant sobs and sighs have not ceased in their cells, nor have cries and gnashing of teeth ceased in their tortures… Truth kills them, and lies liberate them from death."



Pope Honorius II recognised the Order of the Knights Templar at the Council of Troyes in 1129

It is of no surprise that when the Templars were brought to trial, many confessed to the offences put against them. The Order was faced with five initial charges: the renouncement of and spitting on the cross during initiation; the kissing of the initiate on the navel, mouth and posteriors; the permitting of homosexual acts; that the cord they wore had been wrapped around an idol they worshipped; and that they did not consecrate the host during mass. Over the trials, the charges against the Templars grew and grew in number, ranging from burning infants to forcing young brethren to eat the ashes of the dead. Although these charges seem outrageous and somewhat farfetched today, Philip was operating at a time when paranoia surrounding the devil was so rife that it could be reasonably believed that such practices had infiltrated the church.

In hearings presided over by the inquisitors who had overseen the torture, 134 of 138 brothers confessed to one or more of the charges. De Molay himself signed a confession after undergoing the flaying of his limbs and testicles. This was quickly followed by matching confessions from all senior members of the Order. However, when Clement insisted the confessions be heard before a papal committee, De Molay and his men did an about turn. Safely away from Philip's control, De Molay retracted his confession, claiming he only gave it initially due to the torture he suffered. The other Templars followed suit and Philip's plans for a swift and brutal end to the Order vanished.

In an attempt to convince Clement, Philip visited him at Poitiers and sent 72 Templars to confess before him. He had his forces dispense pamphlets and give speeches concerning the depravity of the Templars. Philip warned that if the pope didn't act, he would have to be removed in order to defend Catholicism. Harangued, bullied and now under virtual house arrest, Clement gave in and ordered an investigation into the Templars. De Molay and the other senior members retracted their retractions and Philip's grand plans were in motion once again.

The Templars had nothing in the form of legal council; De Molay expressed desires to defend his order but was unable to as a "poor, unlettered knight." In 1310, two Templars with legal training made an impressive defence against the charges - insisting that the Templars were not only innocent

The Templars Across Europe

When the pope ordered Christian monarchs across Europe to arrest Templars, not all were willing

British Isles

Edward II was initially sceptical about the Templars' guilt and had no reasons to view them as a threat. He wrote to the pope in defence of the Order, but was eventually forced to arrest and try many Templars. Initially, torture was not allowed and all the Templars pleaded innocent, but when the pope's inquisitors took over, confessions came fast. However, they were spared burning and simply forced to repent publicly. Those who refused were incarcerated until death.

Italy

The situation in Italy varied. The Papal States unsurprisingly acted at once, but in Lombardy there was widespread support for the Order. For the number of Templars confessing to the accusations, there were just as many claiming the others were lying. In Florence, despite using torture, only 6 of 13 Templars confessed.

Cyprus

King Amaury de Lusignan had earned his crown thanks to the Templars, so was understandably reluctant to arrest them. However, the leading Templars were eventually incarcerated after putting up a brave resistance. At trial, there were many witnesses who praised the Templars, but the king was brutally murdered during the trial and Henry II, enemy of the Templars, regained the throne. Torture began almost immediately, and many perished while protesting their innocence.

Portugal

The Templars in Portugal got off lightly compared to their counterparts elsewhere. King Denis I refused to persecute the Order, but could not overrule the papal bull to abolish the Templars. Instead, the Templars re-branded themselves as the 'Order of Christ' with the assured protection of Denis I, who also negotiated with Clement's successor for the Order to inherit the Templars' assets.

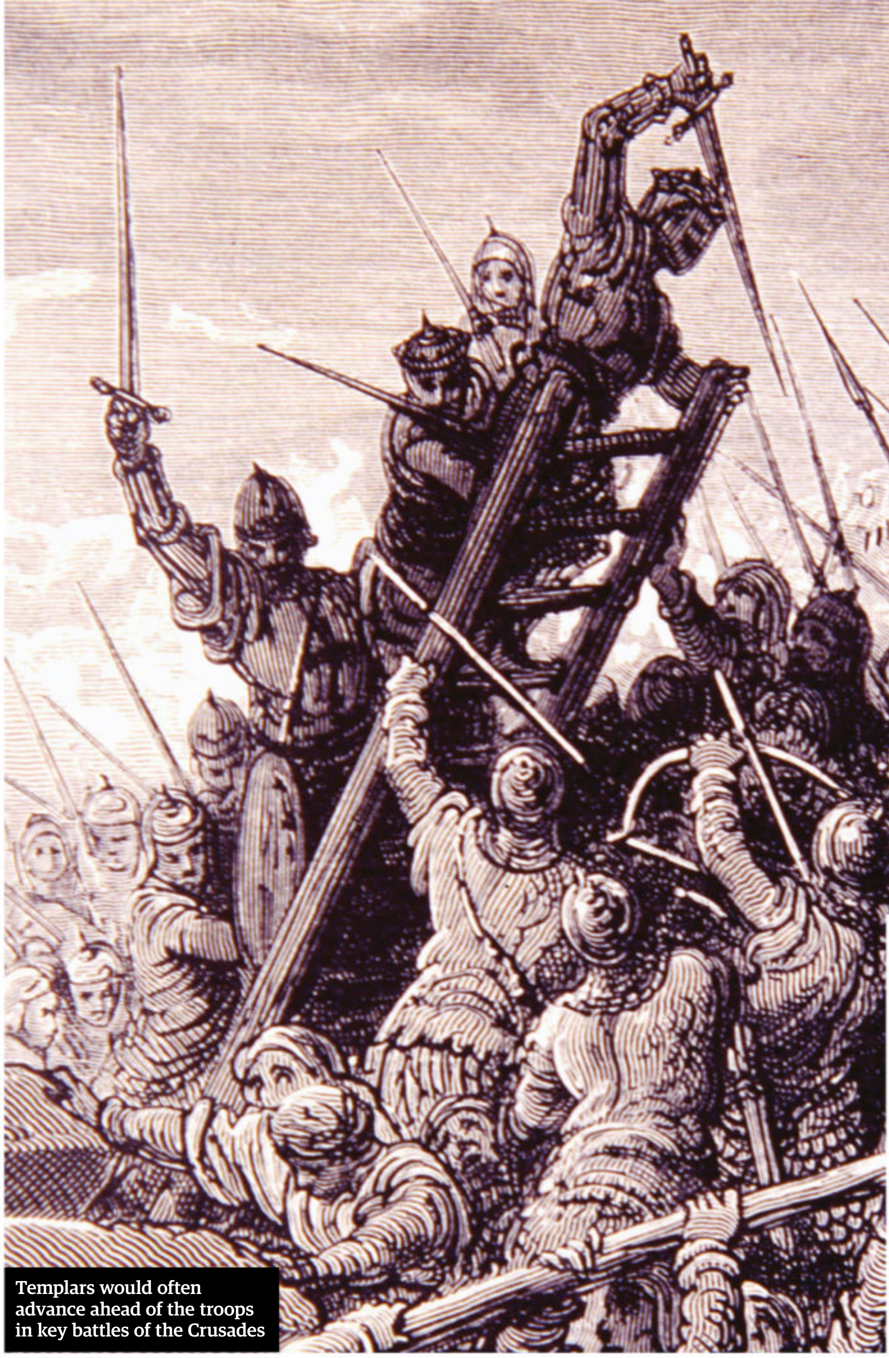
Iberian Peninsula

Despite initial doubts, James II of Aragon ordered the arrest of most of the Templars on 6 January 1308, before the pope ordered him to do so. However, many of the Templars set up defences in their castles and appealed for help, which unfortunately did not come. All of the Templars pleaded their innocence. With torture prohibited, no confessions were secured, and no Templar was condemned to death for heresy.

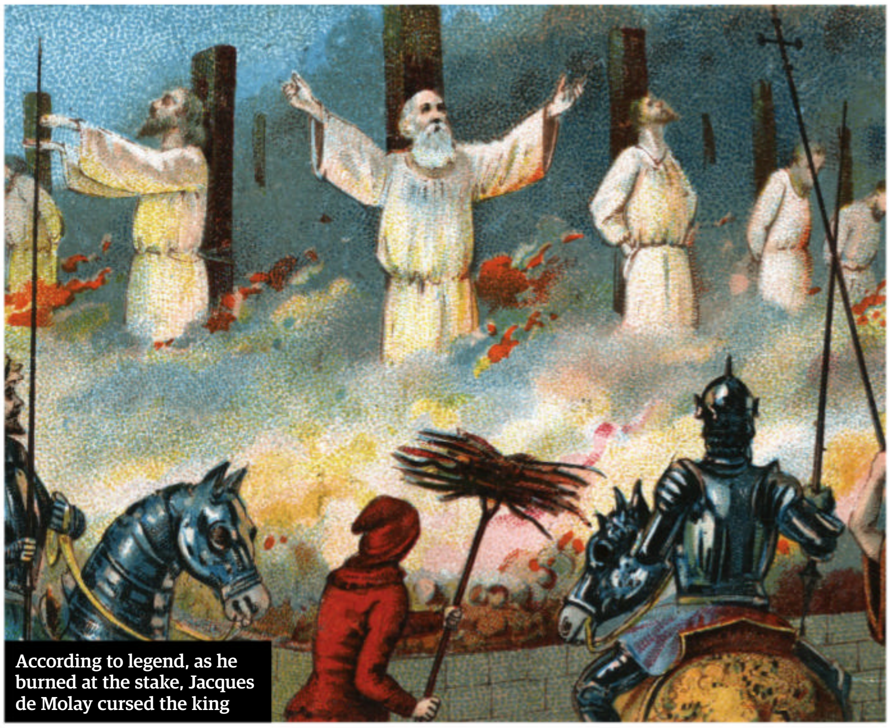
Guilty or Innocent?

Was there any truth to the crimes the Templars burned for?

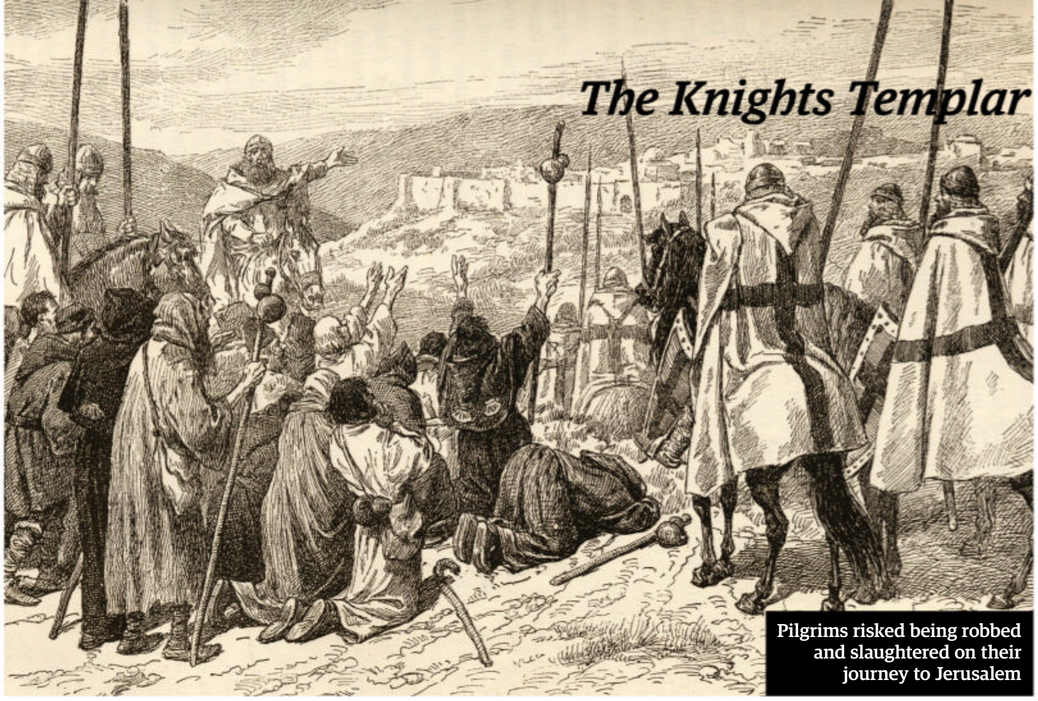
	FOR	AGAINST
SPITTING ON THE CROSS	Although often written as one of Philip's many trumped-up charges, there is evidence that this accusation had basis in fact. Not only did a number of Templars confess to it, but Philip's spies, who secretly joined the Order, confirmed it. A recent discovery of the 'Chinon Parchment' in the Vatican library further confirms the charges. Under questioning in 1308, Jacques de Molay admitted to such practices.	Although De Molay confirmed that spitting on the cross took place, chalking this up to heresy shows a lack of understanding. De Molay said these practices were designed to harden a Templar to the torture he would be subjected to by Saracens, training them to deny their faith "with the mind only and not with the heart." Philip's spies may very well have witnessed such acts, but they likely misunderstood their purpose.
WORSHIP OF AN IDOL CALLED BAPHOMET	The charge put against the Templars read "they surrounded or touched each head of the idols with small cords, which they wore around themselves next to the shirt or the flesh." Unlike Philip's other charges, this accusation was so specific to the Templars that it's difficult to believe he didn't have some inside information. Many knights did admit to worshipping this idol, which usually took the form of a life-sized head. We know for a fact that the Knights Templar possessed heads, such as the head of St Euphemia of Chalcedon. The fact that the Order kept these heads means that they certainly could have worshipped them in some way.	Only nine Templars in the Paris trials admitted to head worship, and descriptions of this 'idol' differed across Europe. In one version it was "covered in old skin, with two carbunkles for eyes," in another it was made of gold and silver; one had three or four legs, while in another account the head had horns. These conflicting accounts heavily indicate that these confessions were the result of torture. This idol was allegedly named 'Baphomet', but it may be the case that this was a mistranslation of 'Mahomet', ie Muhammad. Either way, if the Templars did indeed worship such an idol, it seems unusual that their temples were not filled with clear symbols of this figure.
HOMOSEXUALITY	The charges the Templars faced were that "they told the brothers whom they received they could have carnal relations together… that they ought to do and submit to this mutually." As the Templars took vows of celibacy and were not permitted to wed, it was believed that they engaged in homosexual activity to satisfy their desires. Although few confessed, many testified that sexual activity was not prohibited. The fact that so many denied it under torture is an indication of just how shamefully sodomy was viewed, giving the Templars all the more reason to hide the truth.	This was the most common accusation used during this era to discredit or ruin anyone. Philip had already charged Pope Boniface VIII with very similar accusations, and it seemed to be his favourite tool to use against his enemies as it was difficult to disprove. However, despite the torture, only three Templars confessed to sodomy in the Paris trials. Although De Molay was quick to confess to denying Christ, he vehemently opposed this accusation, stating that the Templar rules clearly prohibit any such behaviour with harsh punishment, such as expulsion from the Order.



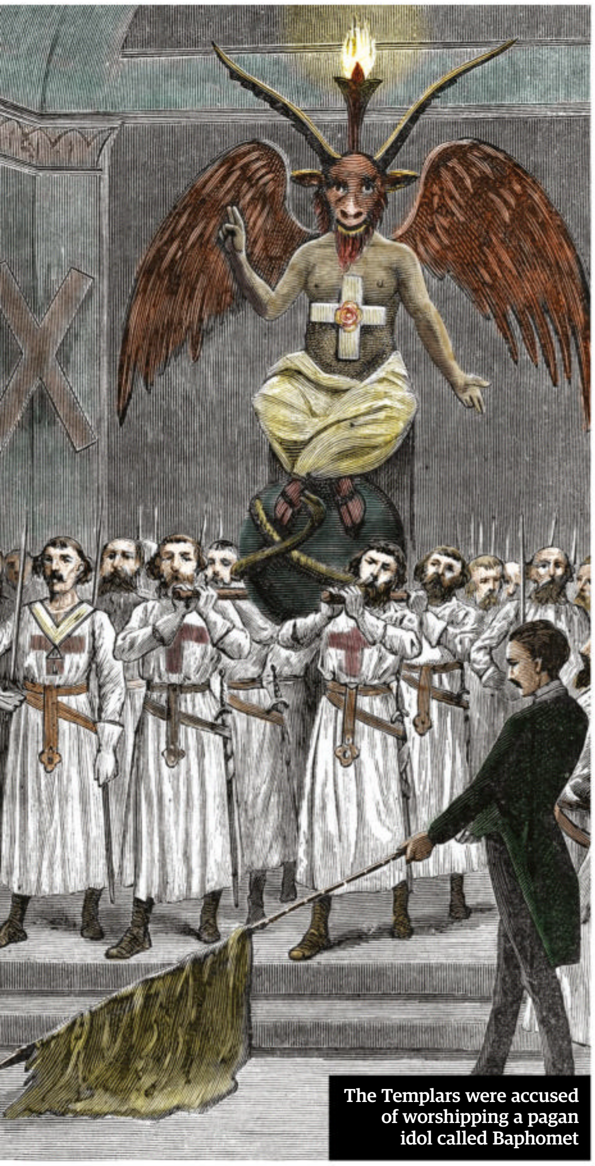
Templars would often advance ahead of the troops in key battles of the Crusades



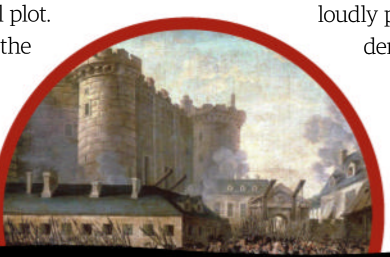
According to legend, as he burned at the stake, Jacques de Molay cursed the king



Pilgrims risked being robbed and slaughtered on their journey to Jerusalem



The Templars were accused of worshipping a pagan idol called Baphomet



TEMPLAR MYSTERIES

French Revolution

When Louis XVI was executed by guillotine at the height of the French Revolution, according to some sources a man jumped up onto the platform and dipped his fingers in the blood. He cried out "Jacques de Molay, thus you are avenged!" Then the crowd cheered. The legend that the Templars would enact revenge upon the French monarchy who had damned them was a popular rumour at the time, so speculation that they played a key part in starting the revolution was rife. This legend works alongside the idea that the remaining Templars went underground to continue their work, so relies on quite a leap of faith. But nevertheless, Jacques de Molay did indeed have his revenge.

but also at the sharp end of a cruel plot. The tide was beginning to turn in the Templars' favour, so Philip made a brutal decision. On 12 May 1310, 54 Templars who had previously withdrawn their confessions were burned at the stake as relapsed heretics and the two Templar defenders disappeared from prison.

With no defence, the Templar case crumbled. Under extreme pressure from Philip, Clement issued an edict that officially dissolved the Order. This didn't mean the brothers were guilty, but it was the end of the Order for good. Much to Philip's annoyance, a second papal bull was issued that transferred the Templars' wealth to the Hospitaller. Finally, the bull 'Considerantes Dudum' allowed each province to deal with the Templars residing there as they saw fit. The fate of the leaders, however, was in the hands of the church.

De Molay and three of his senior members languished in prison, awaiting news of their fates. Finally, on 18 March 1314, the leaders were led out to a platform in front of Notre Dame to hear their sentences. All four were old men; De Molay was, by now, at least 70, while the others ranged from 50-60. Due to their earlier confessions, they were found guilty of heresy and condemned to life imprisonment. Two of the men silently accepted their fate, but faced with living out the rest of his life starving in a dank, dark cell as the last leader of a humiliated and disgraced order, De Molay finally found his voice. To the shock of the crowd, and the horror of the cardinals, the grand master and his loyal master of Normandy, Geoffroi de Charney, loudly protested their innocence. They denied their confessions, insisting their order was nothing but holy. For seven years of imprisonment, De Molay had failed to defend his order, but now he was doing it – with his life.

This was completely unexpected, and left the cardinals confused about what to do. When the news reached Philip, he was furious. He ruled that as the Templars were now professing their innocence, they were guilty of being relapsed heretics, the punishment for which was death. Before the end of the day, De Molay and De Charney were dead. Instead of living out his final days disgraced in a cell, De Molay's final moments led many to hail him as a martyr.

The remaining Templars were not released from their monastic vows and many were subjected to penances such as lengthy prison sentences. Others joined the Knights Hospitallers and some were sent to live out their remaining days in isolated monasteries. Even with these numbers accounted for, there are still question marks over what happened to the tens of thousands of brothers across Europe. The Order's archive was never found along with the majority of their treasures, leading many to believe that the Templars received some sort of warning, allowing many to escape prior to the initial arrests. Various conspiracy theories regarding the fate of the remaining Templars have been concocted since then. Although we do know the sad tale that ended the Order, the mystery of what became of the remaining Templars is likely to stay unsolved.

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Downfall of a Duchess

Eleanor Cobham was almost Queen of England, but accusations of witchcraft left her publicly humiliated and locked up for life

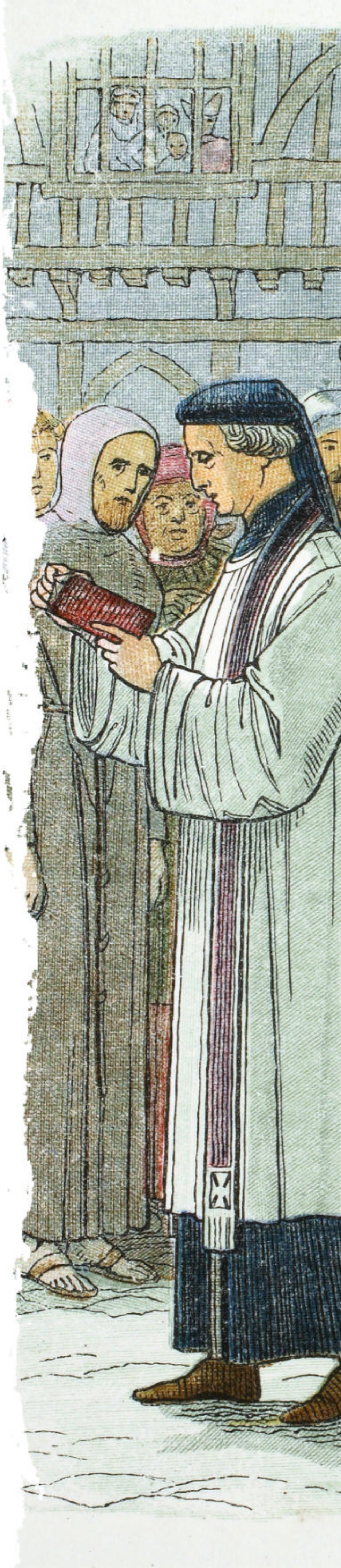
As the cold winter days of November turned into the icy nights of December 1441, one of the most famous royal women in Europe faced up to a life sentence in jail. The prisoner – Eleanor of Gloucester – had already had to deal with public humiliation and she knew she would die behind bars. Yet, just six months earlier she had been a royal duchess and wife of the heir to the throne, only one step away from being Queen of England. That very proximity to the crown may well have led to the accusations of witchcraft, which had put her in prison – claims that were the downfall of a duchess. Her conviction for witchcraft caused shock waves across Europe and it would change the way England was governed. The Duchess of Gloucester was among the most important people in the country when she was arrested and tried for using magic to try and bring about the death of King Henry VI, her nephew by marriage. Her fall from grace through the summer and autumn of 1441 was almost surreal in its drama. In just a few months, Eleanor went from being a leader of society to an outcast.

In October 1441, she was found guilty of using witchcraft to cause the demise of the monarch and within days she was forced to recant very publicly of her sins. Eleanor was known for her love of luxury, yet in wet and windy conditions, the former first lady of the royal court was made to walk barefoot wearing nothing but a simple shift in front of huge crowds as she carried a lighted taper to the church of St Paul Cross in the City of London to offer prayers of repentance. It was long and arduous. Her prayers offered, she returned to her prison for a few days rest before repeating the process all over again.

Eleanor made three pilgrimages of penitence in total. Following that first visit to St Paul Cross on 13 November 1441, Eleanor walked from London Bridge to Christ Church in Aldgate on the eastern fringes of London two days later. There she offered another candle and more prayers. The final penance took place on 17 November when Eleanor walked – again barefoot and in just her shift – from Queenhithe to St Michaels in Cornhill. The penances were intended to serve as a warning to others not to make the same mistakes and so took place on the busiest days in London: market days. Eleanor's routes took her close to some of the most famous and bustling trading spots in the capital.

Later, these events were represented almost romantically by painters but the reality was different. This was a painful and degrading experience and it was meant to be. After all, Eleanor's trial was all about breaking the power of her and her husband, the Duke of Gloucester.

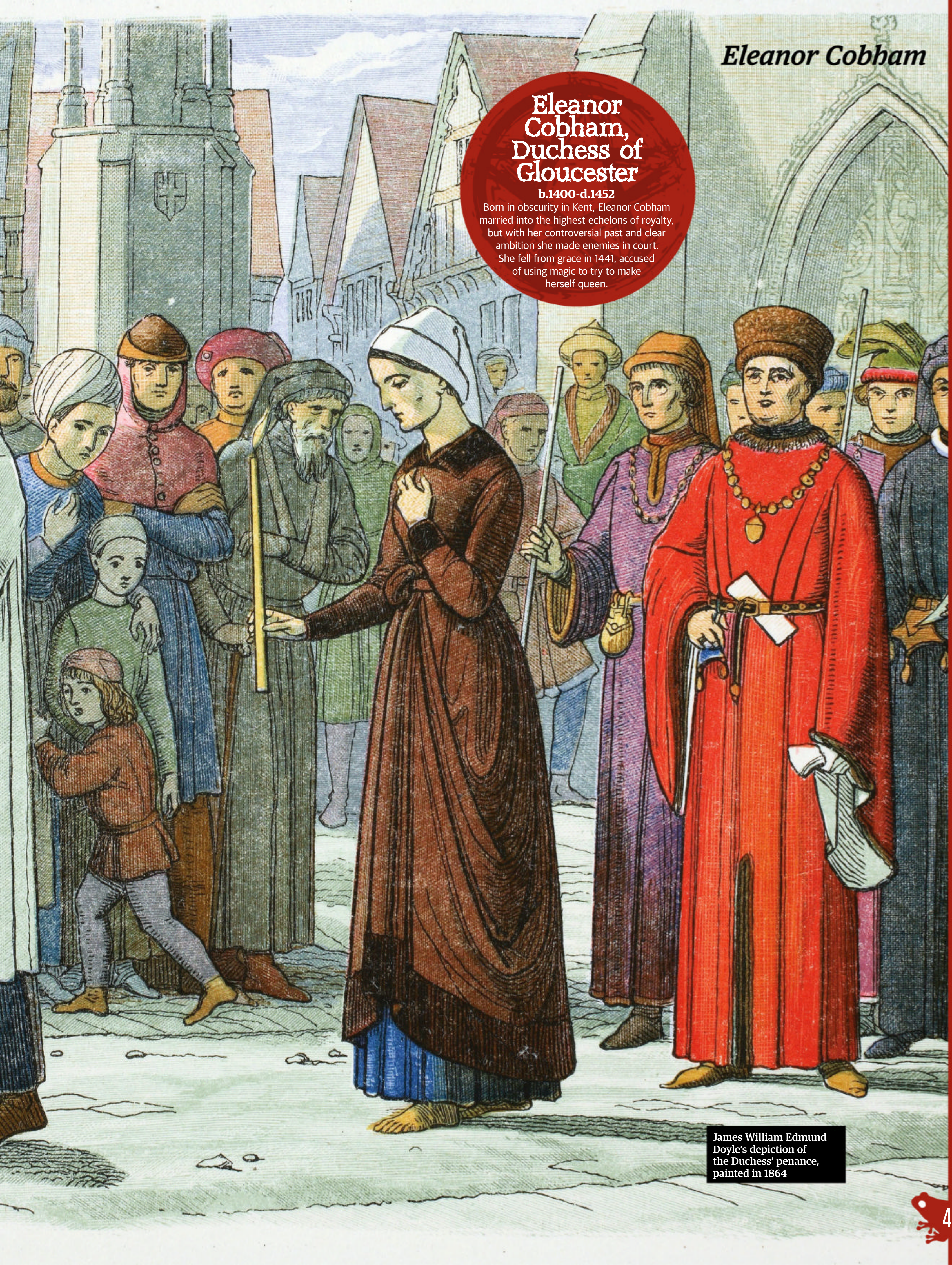
That's not to say that a fear of the occult wasn't part of the plan to bring Eleanor Cobham to trial. In the middle of the 15th century there was a growing suspicion of witchcraft and in the



Eleanor Cobham, Duchess of Gloucester

b.1400-d.1452

Born in obscurity in Kent, Eleanor Cobham married into the highest echelons of royalty, but with her controversial past and clear ambition she made enemies in court. She fell from grace in 1441, accused of using magic to try to make herself queen.

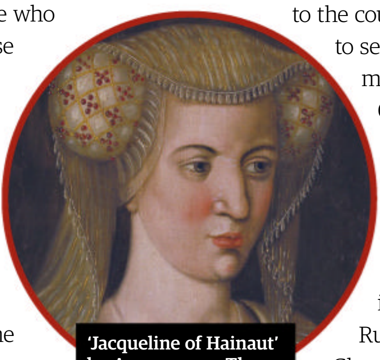


James William Edmund Doyle's depiction of the Duchess' penance, painted in 1864

1430s and 1440s there were sporadic persecutions, mainly of women, in parts of Europe including Italy and Switzerland. At a time when science couldn't explain the mysteries of everyday life, many people looked to magic, to wise women and to astrology for help. However, the powerful Church still had scope for punishing those who transgressed, while the royal house of Lancaster had been diligent in striking out heresies. Dissent from the religious norms of the time was a serious matter.

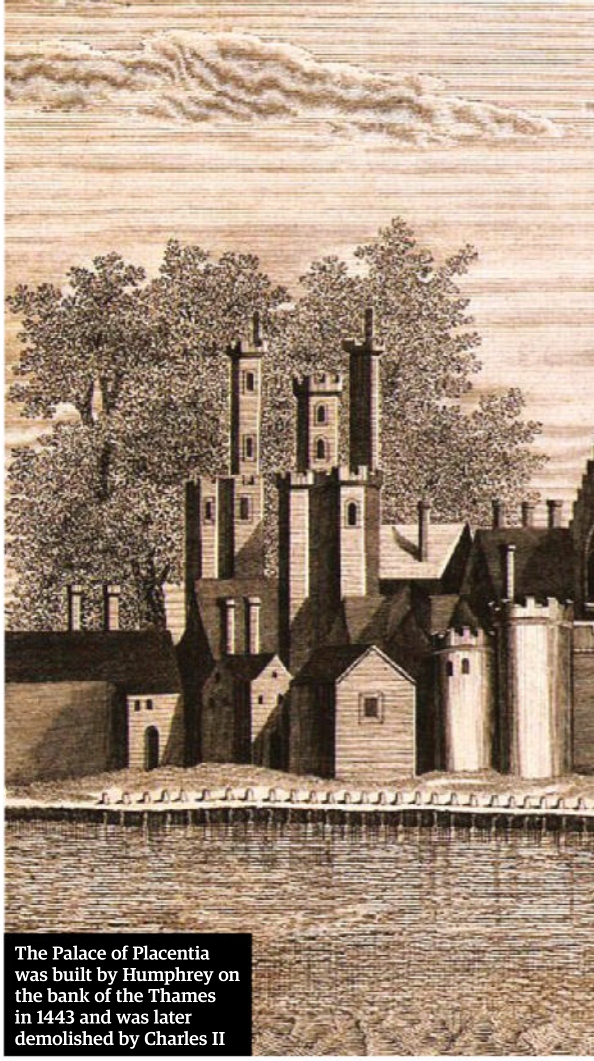
Ever since her marriage to Humphrey, Eleanor had been at the heart of the court built by her husband, which attracted some of the brightest minds on the continent, but there were continuous rumours that Humphrey and his wife were anything but conservative in their beliefs. Even before the whispers of witchcraft came to light, there were plenty who were willing to believe the worst of Eleanor.

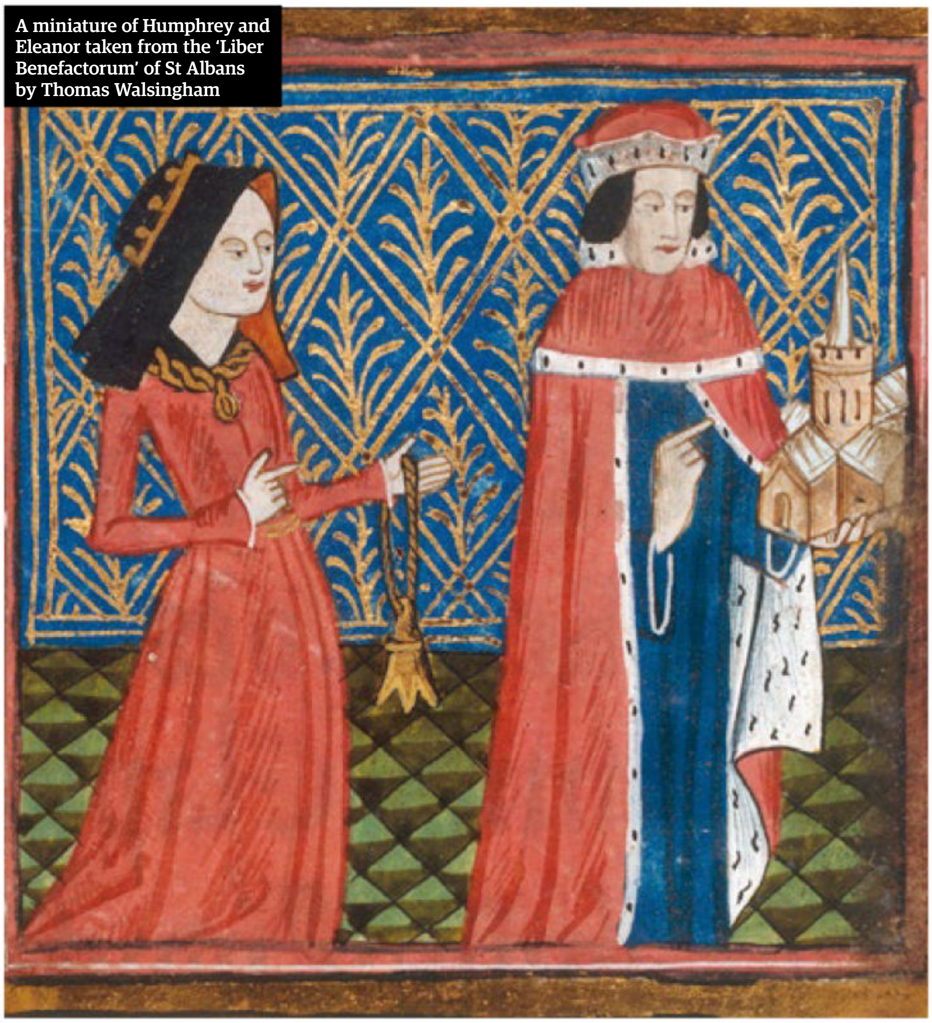
The Duchess of Gloucester was far from an ideal royal bride. She had been born in Kent around 1400 to Sir Reginald Cobham, who was also known as Baron Sterborough, and his wife, Eleanor Culpeper. They were hardly regal beginnings and Eleanor would have been considered lucky when, as a young woman, she won a place as lady in waiting in royal circles. She was appointed to the household of the heiress, Jacqueline of Hainaut, who came to the court of Henry V looking for help to secure her inheritance. Jacqueline married Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, the youngest brother of Henry V, and they had gone overseas to win control of her lands. Humphrey soon returned to England, however, and his wife was captured and imprisoned soon afterwards.

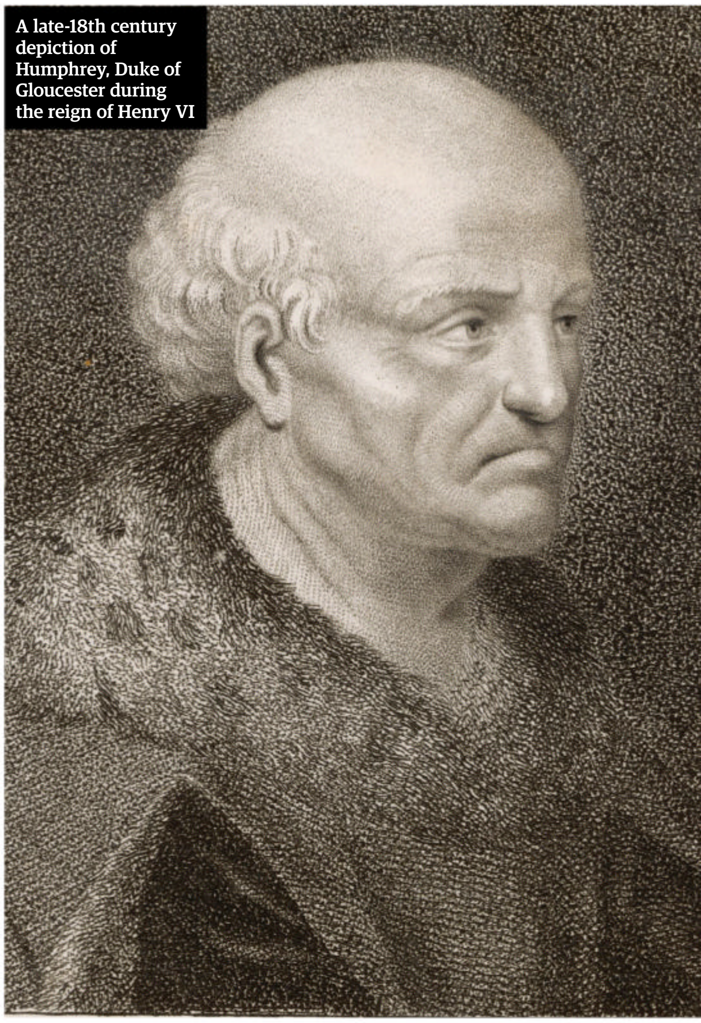

'Jacqueline of Hainaut' by Anonymous. The first wife of Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester

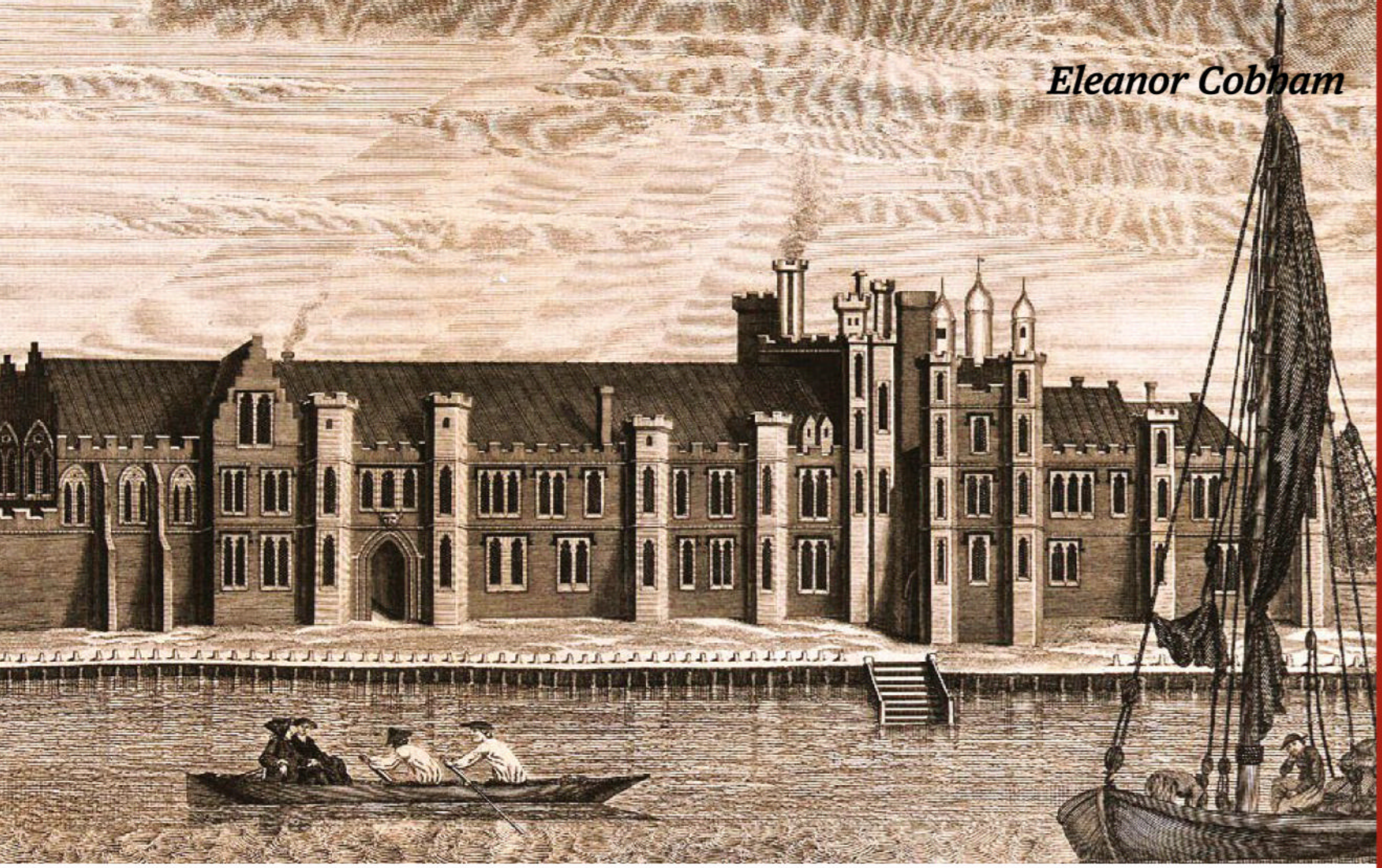
Rumours grew that the Duke of Gloucester had taken Eleanor as his mistress. When the Pope annulled their marriage in 1428, Humphrey promptly married his duchess' servant, Eleanor.

Suddenly, the knight's daughter from Kent was a royal duchess and among the most important people in the land, but the fact that she had been a mistress before a wife went against her. When her husband built a fabulous palace in Greenwich,


The Palace of Placentia was built by Humphrey on the bank of the Thames in 1443 and was later demolished by Charles II


A miniature of Humphrey and Eleanor taken from the 'Liber Benefactorum' of St Albans by Thomas Walsingham


A late-18th century depiction of Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester during the reign of Henry VI



Eleanor Cobham

History's royal witches

Eleanor Cobham wasn't the first - or last - royal woman to be accused of using witchcraft

Isabella of Angoulême

b.1188-d.1246

Isabella of Angoulême was accused of bewitching her husband, King John, so that he neglected his royal duties. The claims were made by a monk, Roger of Wendover, who said she used her powers of witchcraft or sorcery to stop John defending his lands in France and so plunging the King's reign into crisis. Isabella was much younger than her husband who was clearly smitten with her. In an age of suspicion, his lust was seen as the result of his queen using magic.

Punishment

None at the time, although Isabella's reputation was clouded with suspicion from then on.

Joan of Navarre

b.1370-d.1437

Joan had been queen consort of Henry IV, but following his death she was accused of using witchcraft against her stepson-in-law, Henry V. He was much admired for famous military victories including Agincourt and had been close to his step mother. However, as queen dowager she had a healthy income, which was seen as a possible source of revenue for the already expensive wars in France.

Punishment

Joan was imprisoned in Pevensey Castle, while her fortune went to the crown. As Henry V lay dying, he asked for her to be freed and soon she was released and her estates returned to her.

Jacquetta of Luxembourg

b.1415-d.1472

Jacquetta saw her daughter become Queen of England when Elizabeth Woodville married Edward IV. When his House of York tumbled briefly from power in 1469, Jacquetta faced a court on charges of witchcraft. She was accused of using magic to bring about Elizabeth and Edward's marriage. Her trial was shown a small model of a man she was said to have made to perform witchcraft, while one witness said he saw two images to represent the couple.

Punishment

Jacquetta of Luxembourg was acquitted of all charges as the Wars of the Roses turned in her son-in-law's favour again.

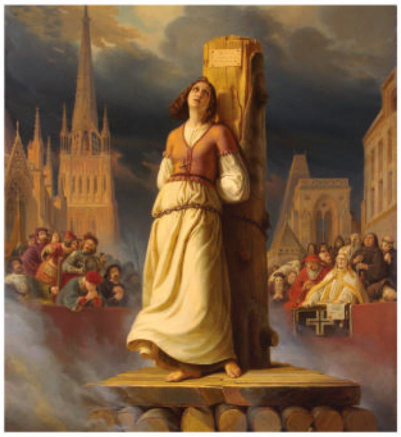
Elizabeth Woodville

b.1437-d.1492

Elizabeth was accused of using magic to make Edward IV of York marry her. They had met, legend says, beneath a tree close to her home and wed in secret, causing huge controversy. After Edward's death, his brother, Richard III, claimed his crown and declared Elizabeth's children illegitimate partly because she had used witchcraft to get Edward to marry her. He also claimed she used magic to cause him physical distress.

Punishment

She lived in sanctuary for much of Richard III's reign and lost two of her sons, the Princes in the Tower. After Richard III's death her eldest child was crowned queen consort.



The Fate of Condemned Witches

If found guilty, women could suffer agonising deaths, but repentance might save a life

It's widely believed that witches were burned at the stake, but that gruesome punishment had actually only become a possibility some 40 years before Eleanor's case. Her father-in-law, Henry IV, had passed the law known as De Heretico Comburendo in 1401, which authorised execution by burning for those convicted of heresy with a treasonable intent. Witchcraft was heresy, an action that went against the established religious customs of the time, and judged by ecclesiastical courts. But Henry V brought in the 1414 Suppression of Heresy Act which gave secular officials the power to arrest those suspected of dissension and hand them over to the Church so that they could then sentence them accordingly.

There were a wide range of punishments: heretics in the 15th century could lose their land, their wealth and all their possessions but if they recanted then they might well live to see another day. Repeat offenders, like Margery Jourdemayne, were condemned to death – the 1414 Act says they should be hanged and their gallows then destroyed by fire. Actual burning at the stake wasn't widespread in England at the time, but it had become more common on the continent throughout the 14th and 15th centuries. Perhaps the best known use of the punishment was the death of Joan of Arc in 1431 after her capture by the English.

Henry VIII brought in the first act, which characterised witchcraft as a secular crime. The 1542 Witchcraft Act demanded execution for those convicted with the condemned losing all their money and possessions. Elizabeth I was more lenient towards those named as witches – perhaps because her own mother, Anne Boleyn, had experienced accusations. The 1563 Witchcraft Act only permitted execution when harm had been caused to another. In 1604, under James I, a new act extended the crime to those who invoked evil spirits and the witch hunts of the early-17th century would see many women hanged as a result of that.

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known as Bella Court or La Pleasaunce, Eleanor of Gloucester had her own glittering court to command, and according to chronicles of the time she enjoyed her royal position being described by some as ambitious and arrogant. By now Henry V was dead and his baby son had become Henry VI. Eleanor's husband was Lord Protector with considerable power, but while his charm and love of learning made him a hugely popular figure, in the corridors of power he was beginning to accumulate enemies. Humphrey, who had fought alongside his famous warrior king brother at the Battle of Agincourt, was determined to continue the campaign to secure the throne of France for his family, but others now found that war too expensive. Among them was his great uncle, Cardinal Henry Beaufort, and the two took up increasingly polarised positions.

In 1435, Humphrey became even more important when his brother, John, Duke of Bedford died. The Duke of Gloucester was now heir presumptive to the throne and Eleanor was next in line to be queen. The following summer she was made a Lady of the Garter. She walked into the splendour of Windsor Castle wanting just one thing – an heir. For despite eight years of marriage, Eleanor had yet to produce a child. Her husband had two illegitimate offspring, but there is little evidence to suggest Eleanor was their mother. A baby, especially a boy, would make the Duchess of Gloucester unassailable. As she approached the age of 40, however, she remained childless. Her husband had already shown he could change his mind quite easily when it suited him, and there was nothing to say his need for an heir might not lead to an alteration in Eleanor's circumstances again.

> “She might have counted herself lucky to be alive”

At the height of the controversy that surrounded her in 1441, Eleanor admitted dabbling in witchcraft, but she always claimed it was only to conceive. There were plenty who didn't believe her, and the accusations – which were many and varied – were played out with a real sense of theatre.

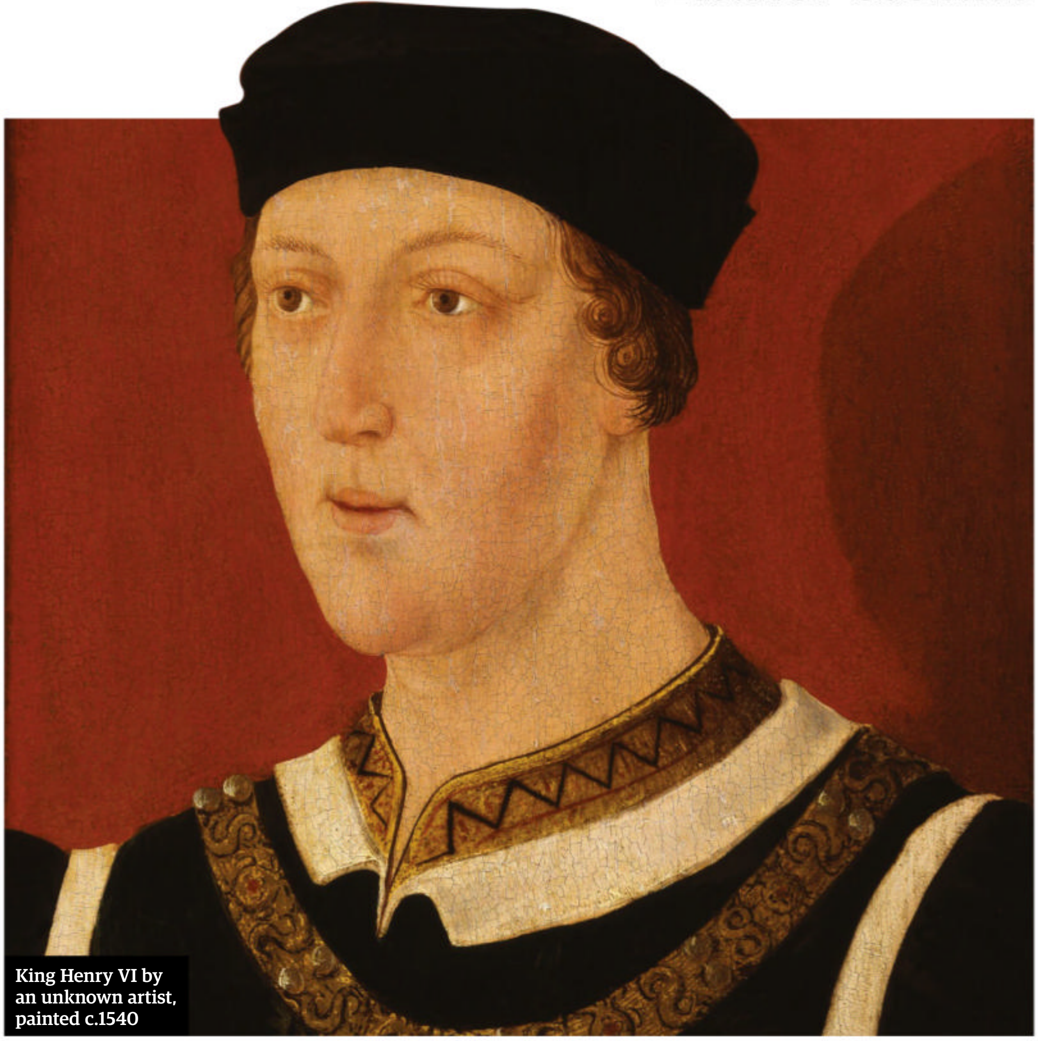
The first inkling of trouble came as she sat down to dine on the eve of the feast of St Peter and St Paul, 24 June 1441. As Eleanor entertained a retinue at an inn in the City of London she was told that two members of her household, Roger Bolingbroke and Thomas Southwell, had been arrested on suspicion of trying to harm the King after another close associate, John Hume, had claimed they

Beaumaris Castle, Anglesey was to be Eleanor's prison from 1449 until her death in 1452

were using sorcery against Henry VI. When Roger Bolingbroke was brought before the Royal Council he implicated Eleanor, saying that the Duchess of Gloucester had first given him the ideas that had got him into so much trouble.

Those ideas caused shock waves. The first was to cast a horoscope for Eleanor herself. Astrology wasn't illegal and it was accepted that casting charts was a fashionable pastime in some parts of society. However, a chart looking at the future of the Duchess brought with it the question of whether she would ever be queen and that implied an interest in the death of the present king, Henry VI. But Bolingbroke and Southwell were also accused of casting a horoscope for Henry himself, one that predicted he would suffer serious illness or worse in the summer of 1441. They were charged with treasonable necromancy.

Eleanor fled into sanctuary at Westminster but she was accused by an ecclesiastical court, not a secular one, and the tradition of safety for crime suspects didn't count when it was the Church judging them. Eleanor was taken to Leeds Castle in Kent while investigations continued. There were also claims that Eleanor had used the services of Margery Jourdemayne, who had been convicted of witchcraft a decade earlier and released on condition she never use it again. Jourdemayne was also under arrest and, like Bolingbroke, implicated the Duchess. The accusations got worse, with claims that Margery Jourdemayne had made a wax figure to represent the King with the aim of hurting it to harm Henry himself. This type of image magic was widely feared. Eleanor and Margery claimed it was to help the Duchess of Gloucester conceive.


King Henry VI by an unknown artist, painted c.1540

On 26 October 1441, Thomas Southwell died in the Tower of London. The official explanation was that his shame had overcome him, but there were rumours he had taken his own life before he could be condemned to death. The following day, Margery Jourdemayne was burned at the stake at Smithfield Market before a huge crowd. On 18 November, Roger Bolingbroke was found guilty of treasonable necromancy and hanged, drawn and quartered. By then, Eleanor was a broken woman.

She herself had admitted buying potions from Margery Jourdemayne to enchant her husband into marrying her and so an application was made to the pope for the royal marriage to be annulled. It was granted on 6 November 1441.

Eleanor lost her royal husband, her royal title and any chance of escaping with little more than a scolding. Within a week, her penances had begun, but by then she might have counted herself lucky to be alive. Her enemies had made sure her shame was complete and by disgracing Eleanor, they tarnished Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, too.

The Duke had been conspicuous by his absence throughout the whole saga, disappearing into the shadows while his nemesis, Cardinal Beaufort, rose in power. After Eleanor's conviction, Humphrey all but retired from public life, leaving the government of England to others. In 1447 he, too, was accused of treason, dying just days after his arrest, leading to speculation he had been poisoned.

Eleanor spent the rest of her life in prison. Her first jail was Chester Castle, but she was soon moved to Kenilworth then to Peel Castle on the Isle of Man. Her final years were spent at Beaumaris Castle on Anglesey Island, hundreds of miles from the glamourous London life that had made her famous and proved her undoing.

Eleanor Cobham died there on 7 July 1452, but the court she had once commanded took little notice. By then, Henry VI was in his 30s with a strong-willed queen, Margaret of Anjou, and in the middle of escalating arguments over power, which would turn into the Wars of the Roses.

Eleanor was largely forgotten and appeared as a footnote in royal history as a stereotypical wicked witch. She wasn't the only royal woman to dabble in magic, but she was one of those who suffered the most as a consequence. Whether she was trying to become a mother or a queen is perhaps only truly known to her.

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Elizabeth Woodville, White Queen & Black Magic

Was witchcraft behind the fairy-tale marriage of Edward IV and Elizabeth Woodville?

Elizabeth Woodville

b.1437-d.1492

Best known for her brazen marriage to Edward IV and unenviable role as mother to the tragic Princes in the Tower, Elizabeth had a tumultuous and uncertain position as queen consort of England.

The Spring day in 1464 was bright and fair as Edward IV, England's first Yorkist king, rode with the hunt in Whittlebury Forest. Whether his thoughts lay on his quarry, the weather or the tumultuous times that had brought him the crown, they were soon to be caught by another matter entirely. For there, standing beneath an oak tree, stood the most beautiful of women, a small boy clutching each hand as she watched him approach. Without hesitation she threw herself into his path, pleading with the king to intercede in a matter that would restore the dower lands that were rightly hers and keep her small family from poverty. In that moment the king was struck, not by the earthly arrow of the hunt, but by the arrow of love; a spell from which he would never be released.

That he wanted her there and then there was no question, and none other had before now resisted the handsome young monarch. He could not, however, persuade the vision of loveliness to concede so much as a kiss, and, when there was talk of taking what he desired by force, her protestations regarding her virtue and her honour so shamed the king that he fell on bended knee before her, swearing eternal devotion.

The rest of the story is equally well known; so besotted was the king that he proposed marriage, and the pair were married in secret a short while later, much to the shock and consternation of the king's council and subjects alike when the fact was finally revealed in September of that year.

So goes the popular legend of how the charismatic and womanising King Edward IV

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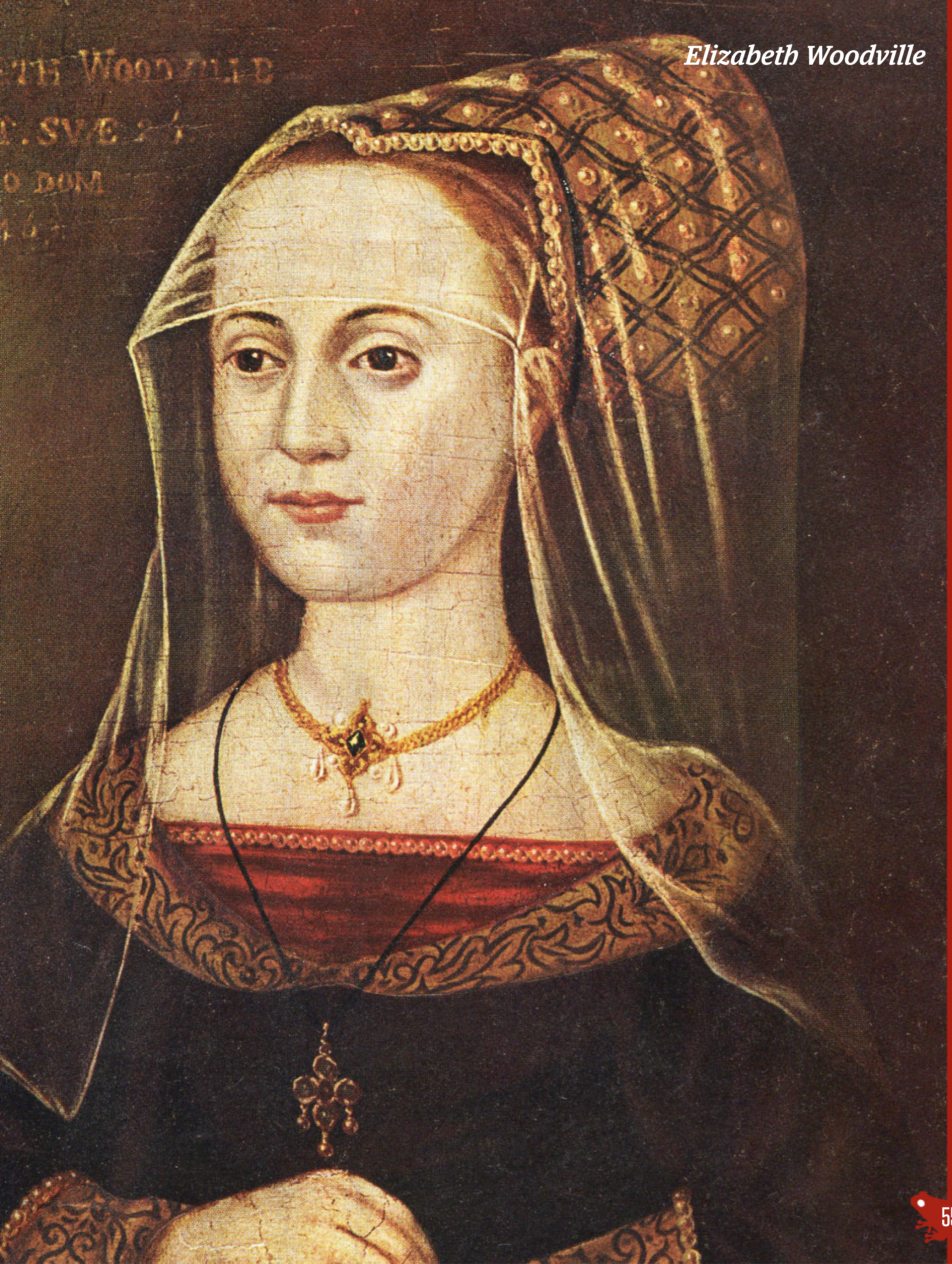
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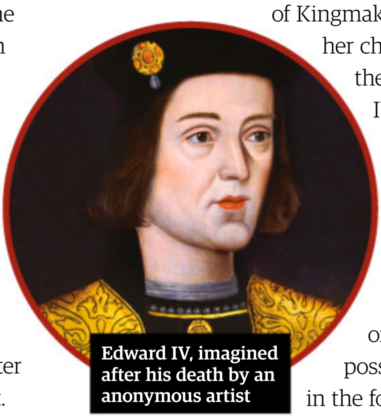
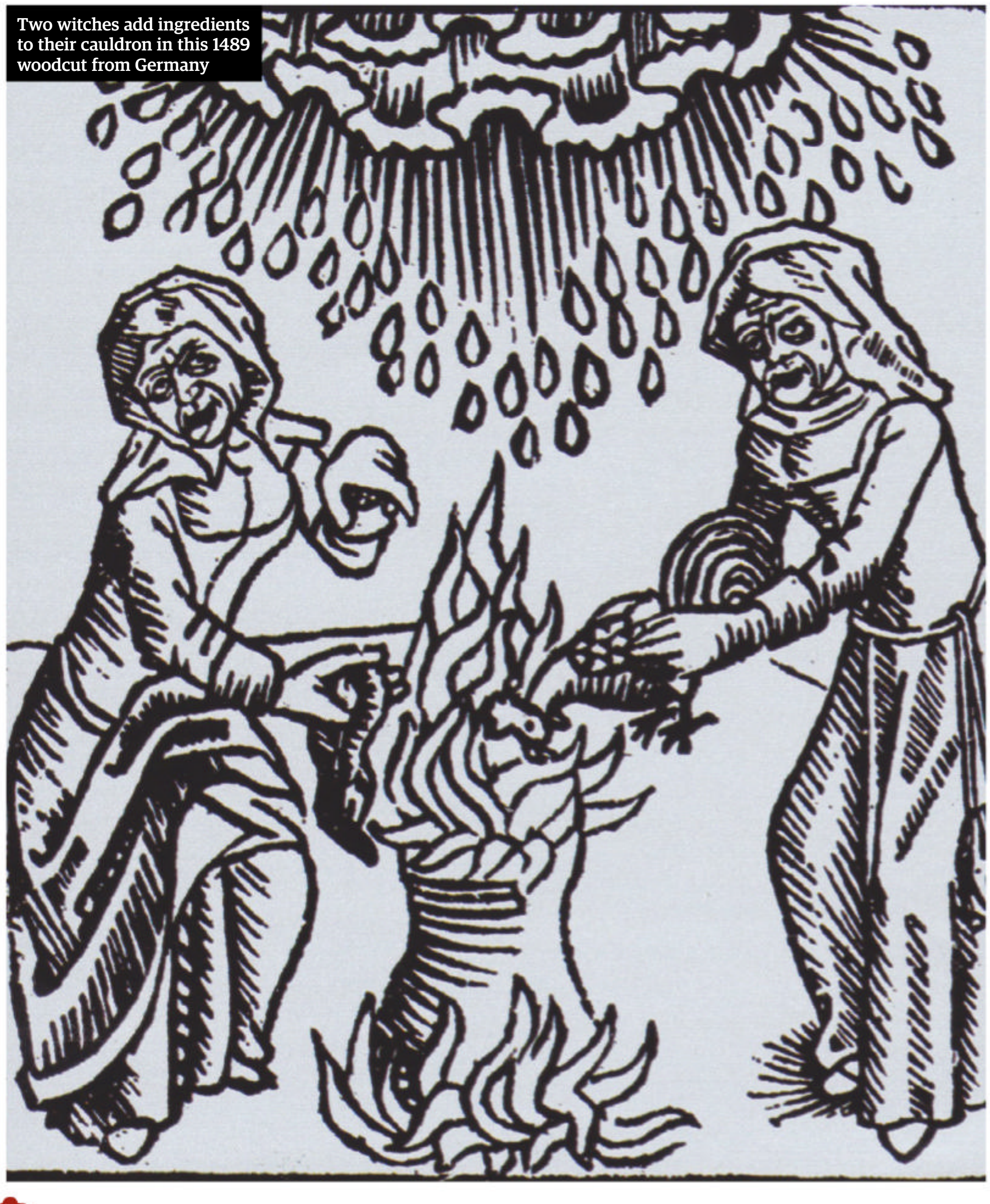
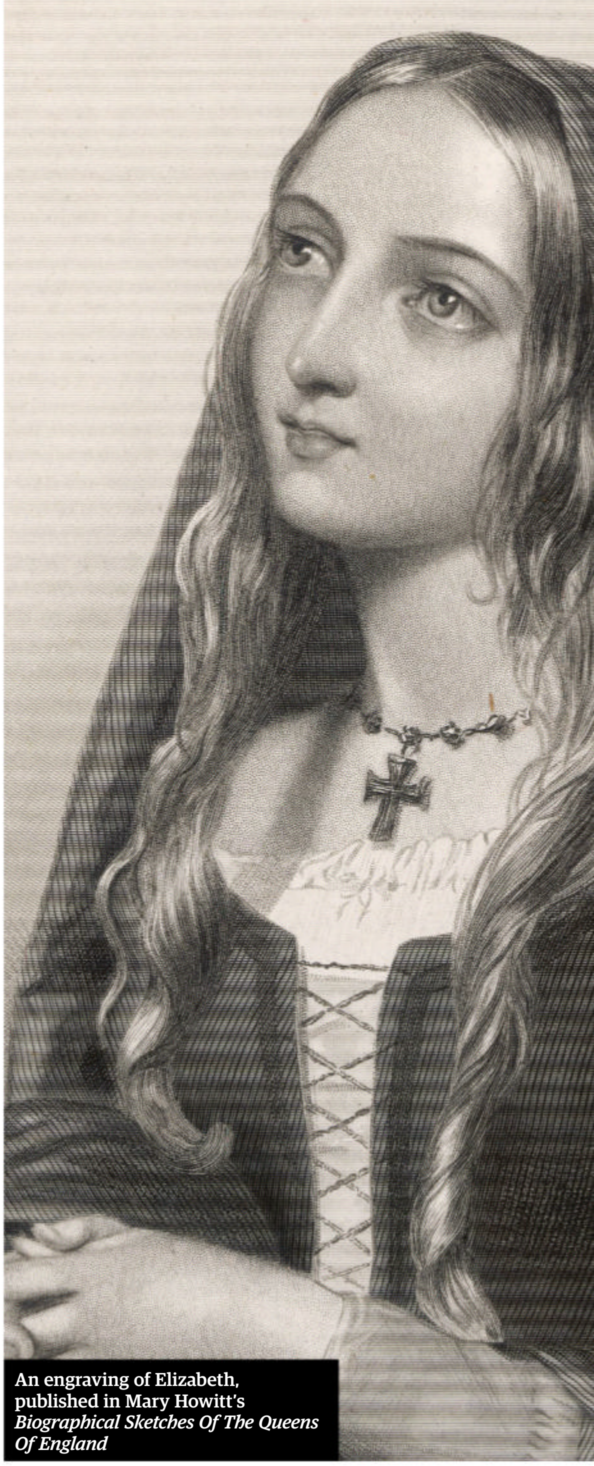
Elizabeth Woodville

met, married and bedded Elizabeth Woodville, the woman for whom he was willing to give everything. The legend has been greatly embroidered and added to over the years, but one tantalising question always remains: what was it that made Edward so ready to risk both earthly and heavenly condemnation in order to make Elizabeth his? The answer, according to one theory, is simple: Edward's commoner Queen snared and held her man not just through womanly wiles alone, but through the more sinister and assured method of witchcraft.

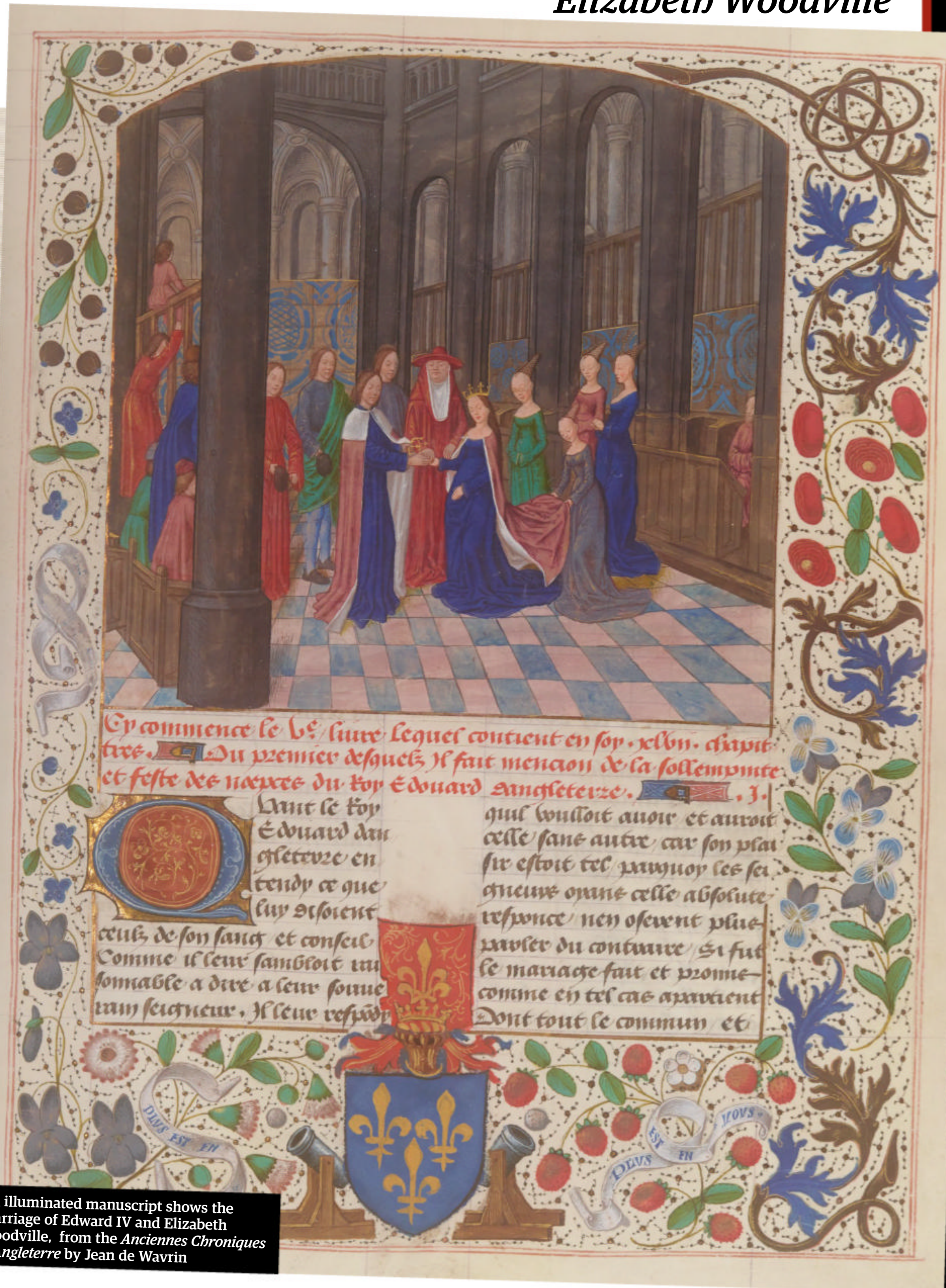
The first rumblings of this accusation came in 1469 and did not involve Elizabeth directly, but her mother, Jacquetta, the former Duchess of Bedford. It was a perilous time for the family; Jacquetta's husband and son had been summarily executed on the orders of Edward, Earl of Warwick, of Kingmaker fame, while Elizabeth and her children were uncertain as to their own future safety. Edward IV himself could offer no help, held prisoner by Warwick, the man who had helped put him on the throne. In the midst of this turmoil, a man named Thomas Wake came forward to accuse Jacquetta Woodville of witchcraft. He had in his possession an image in lead; shaped in the form of a man it had, he insisted, been made by Jacquetta for nefarious purposes. Another man, a parish clerk named John Daunger, also came forward at Wake's bidding,


Edward IV, imagined after his death by an anonymous artist


Two witches add ingredients to their cauldron in this 1489 woodcut from Germany


An engraving of Elizabeth, published in Mary Howitt's *Biographical Sketches Of The Queens Of England*

"Edward's power-hungry brother had seen his chance to seize the throne from his nephew"



Cy commence le ve livre lequel contient en soy .xlvii. chapitres. Du premier desquelz il fait mencion de la sollempnite et feste des nopces du roy Edouard dangleterre. .I.

Quant le roy Edouard dangleterre entendy ce que luy disoient ceulz de son sang et conseil Comme il leur sambloit raisonnable a dire a leur souverain seigneur, Il leur respondi quil vouloit avoir et auroit celle sans autre car son plaisir estoit tel pourquoy les seigneurs oyans celle absolute responce nen oserent plus parler du contraire Si fut le mariage fait et promis comme en tel cas apartient Dont tout le commun et

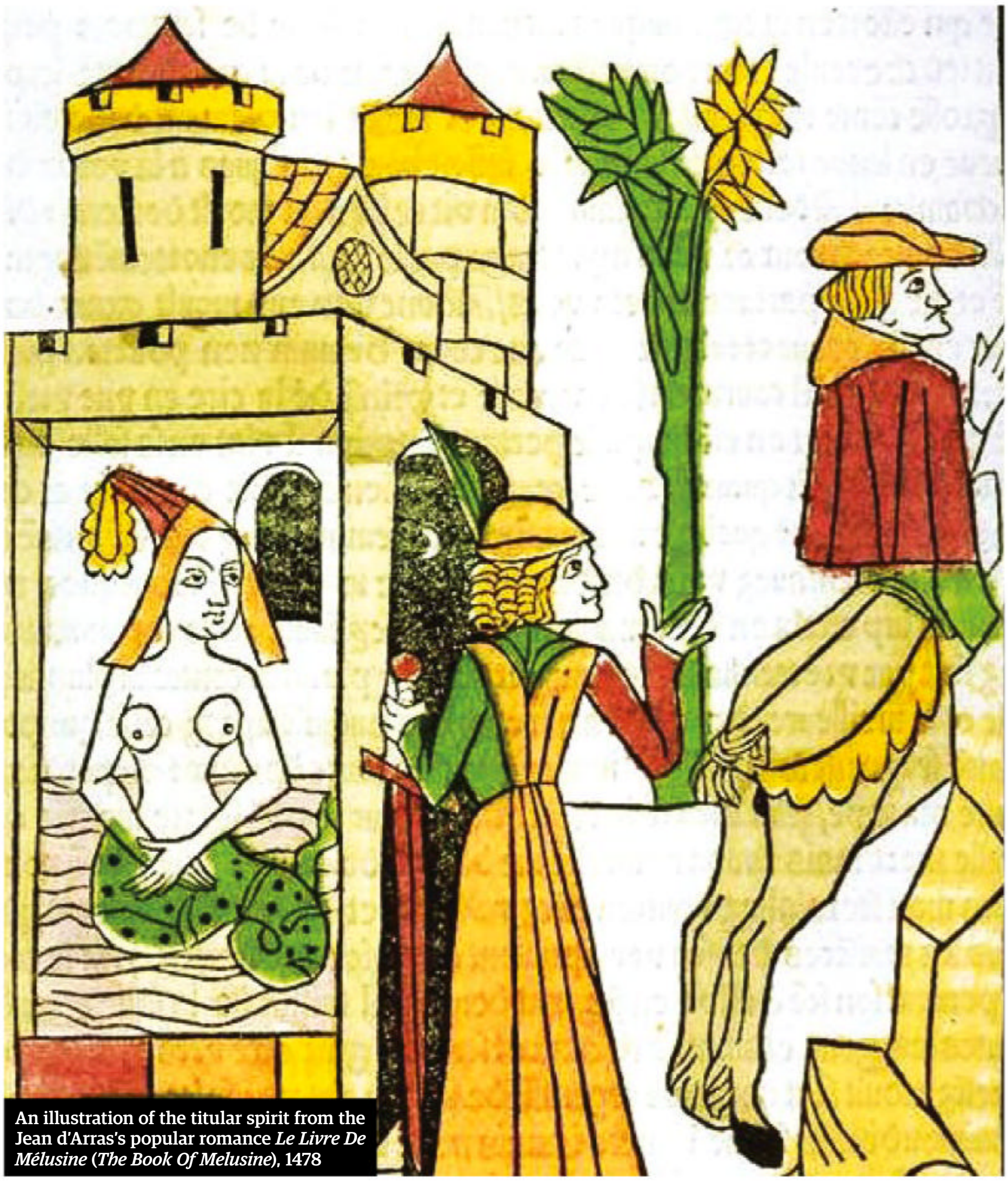
An illuminated manuscript shows the marriage of Edward IV and Elizabeth Woodville, from the *Anciennes Chroniques D'Angleterre* by Jean de Wavrin

corroborating the fact that Jacquetta had also made two further images, one each of the king and queen. The implication was obvious: Elizabeth's mother had used the images and her magical knowledge to bind the king to her daughter in an unnatural fashion.

Jacquetta was arrested and taken to Warwick Castle. The entire matter stank of political intrigue and manipulation; Wake was, conveniently, a staunch supporter of the Earl. They had trifled with the wrong woman, however – Jacquetta called on the support of the mayor of London and others with influence, and although the captive Edward was forced to call witnesses against his mother-in-law, the case swiftly fell apart when the King was once more his own person in January 1470. Determined to clear her name, Jacquetta accused Wake before the King's council of having malicious intentions towards her and, in face of her spirited defence, was acquitted, the fact made part of the public record as agreed by the king and council, which included Warwick.

Any further connection between the Woodville family and witchcraft remained the stuff of whispers until 1483. After the unexpected death of the Edward IV in April of that year, the accusation of witchcraft once again reared its ugly head: with Jacquetta, Warwick and Edward all dead, however, the new target was Elizabeth herself, her accuser none other than Richard, Duke of Gloucester. Edward's brother had seen his chance to ascend the throne, and he was determined to overthrow the power-hungry Woodvilles once and for all.

The story goes that Richard arrived in good spirits to a council meeting, only to abruptly leave the room a short while later. Upon his return his manner was much changed, and with a flourish he pulled back his sleeve to reveal his arm, declaring it badly withered and accusing Elizabeth – "that sorceress" – of causing his affliction. Not only that, but the Dowager Queen had accomplices, one of whom was Jane Shore, the best known and, it was said, best loved, of Edward IV's many mistresses. The accusation was made official in January of the following year when Richard III's first – and only – parliament passed the act of Titulus Regius, which consolidated his power and hold on the throne by declaring the children of Edward IV and Elizabeth illegitimate. The reasons given in the act were two fold: first, it was said that Edward had already been betrothed to Lady Eleanor Butler, and therefore his marriage to Elizabeth was invalid and the children of their union bastards. Second, and the part that has gripped the popular imagination in the years that have followed, the accusation was made that the marriage was invalid because it had been brought about by unnatural means by Elizabeth and her mother, Jacquetta.



An illustration of the titular spirit from the Jean d'Arras's popular romance *Le Livre De Mélusine* (*The Book Of Melusine*), 1478

Passed on 23 January 1484, the act didn't mince words: the marriage was referred to as ungracious and pretended, and by which "the order of all politic rule was perverted." On the witchcraft count, however, little evidence was actually given, only the rather vague assertion that it was the common opinion of people throughout the land. The political ramifications of the act were apparent. Richard assumed power, any claims to the throne of the former queen's children squashed once and for all. Despite this, Elizabeth didn't find herself before the courts, and, with the intended outcome achieved – the disabling of the remains of the Woodville party – there was no need for the new king to push matters, his point driven home loud and clear.

The 'proof' that Elizabeth used witchcraft to snare the king comes from two cases many years after events themselves, both occurring at a time when it was politically expedient to discredit and disarm the powerful and envied Woodville faction. Could there, however, be any truth in the claims of her enemies?

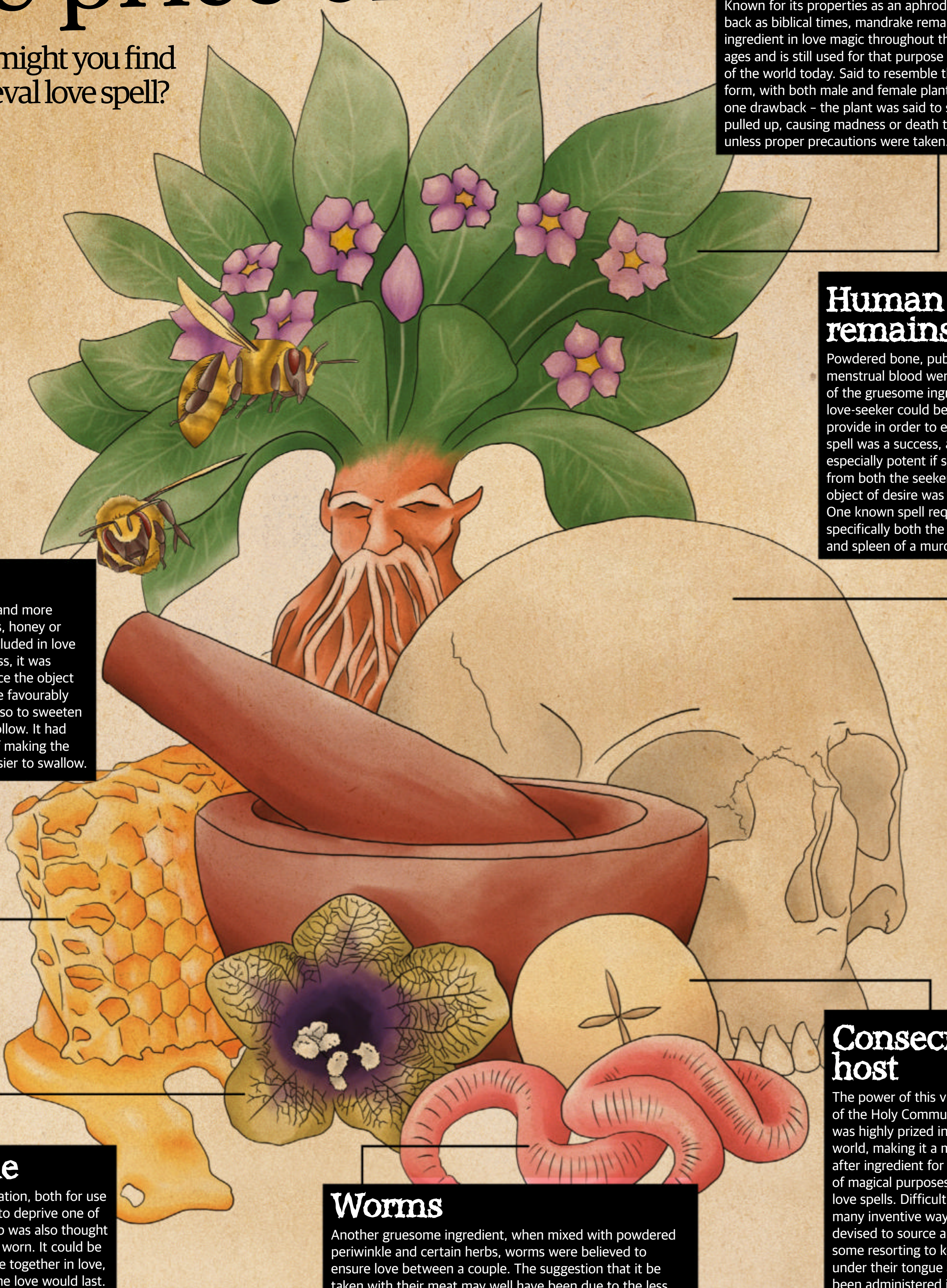
> "It is unlikely indeed there was any truth in the accusations against Elizabeth"

Although it seems outlandish and unbelievable to modern sensibilities, love magic was widely practiced and believed in during 15th century Europe and beyond. Often linked to witchcraft accusations, the practice formed part of the witchcraft acts of the 16th and 17th centuries, and it must be remembered that belief in magic was as staple a belief as that of religion and the Christian God. In 1471, for instance, talk of enchantment entered the tale again, as on Good Friday, Edward IV rode out to meet the forces of the Earl of Warwick at Barnet for what was to prove the deciding battle in the ongoing conflict between the two former allies. The descending fog was said to be so thick that it could not have come from any natural source, and therefore must have been brought about by witchcraft and enchantments.

Elizabeth and her mother were also not the only women with royal connections to be touched by the accusation of witchcraft either before or after. Witchcraft was a particularly lethal accusation to make; it was one of a small amount against which a woman's rank offered scant protection. Joan of Navarre, the Dowager Queen of Henry IV, was imprisoned, albeit briefly, on accusations in 1419. Then there was the large scandal attached to Eleanor Cobham, Duchess of Gloucester, who found herself performing humiliating public penance before being subjected to life imprisonment, all because she had allegedly procured the services of Margery Jourdemayne to make the Duke marry her and also dared to have the king's horoscope drawn up to see whether the Duke – heir to Henry VI – would one day be king. Although matters did not go that far in Elizabeth's case, both she and her mother would have been chillingly aware of the potential consequences of a link between their names and witchcraft.

The price of love

Just what might you find in a Medieval love spell?



Mandrake root

Known for its properties as an aphrodisiac as far back as biblical times, mandrake remained a popular ingredient in love magic throughout the middle ages and is still used for that purpose in some areas of the world today. Said to resemble the human form, with both male and female plants, there was one drawback – the plant was said to shriek when pulled up, causing madness or death to the seeker unless proper precautions were taken.

Human remains

Powdered bone, pubic hair and menstrual blood were just some of the gruesome ingredients a love-seeker could be required to provide in order to ensure their spell was a success, and it was especially potent if something from both the seeker and the object of desire was included. One known spell required rather specifically both the bone marrow and spleen of a murdered boy.

Honey

One of the sweeter and more palatable ingredients, honey or mead were often included in love spells – the sweetness, it was expected, to influence the object of the seeker's desire favourably towards them and also to sweeten the relationship to follow. It had the added benefit of making the concoction much easier to swallow.

Henbane

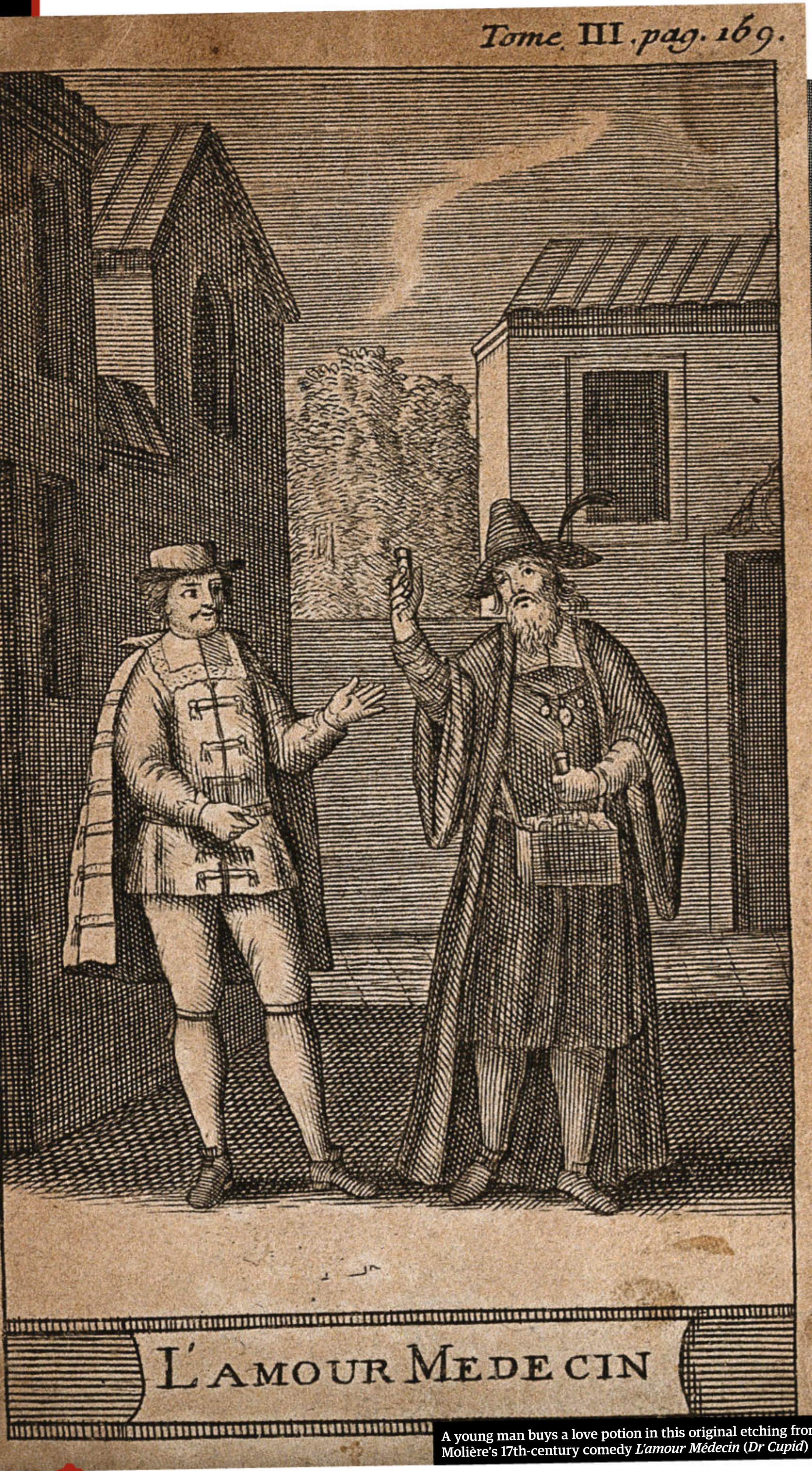
With a sinister reputation, both for use by witches and also to deprive one of her powers, this herb was also thought to attract love when worn. It could be used to bind a couple together in love, and to ensure that the love would last. This ingredient should be used with great caution, however, as it was also known to cause delirium and death.

Worms

Another gruesome ingredient, when mixed with powdered periwinkle and certain herbs, worms were believed to ensure love between a couple. The suggestion that it be taken with their meat may well have been due to the less than encouraging taste. Seemingly a strange choice, worms, due to their obvious link with the earth, were also a potent sign of fertility: a much desired outcome in many love spells.

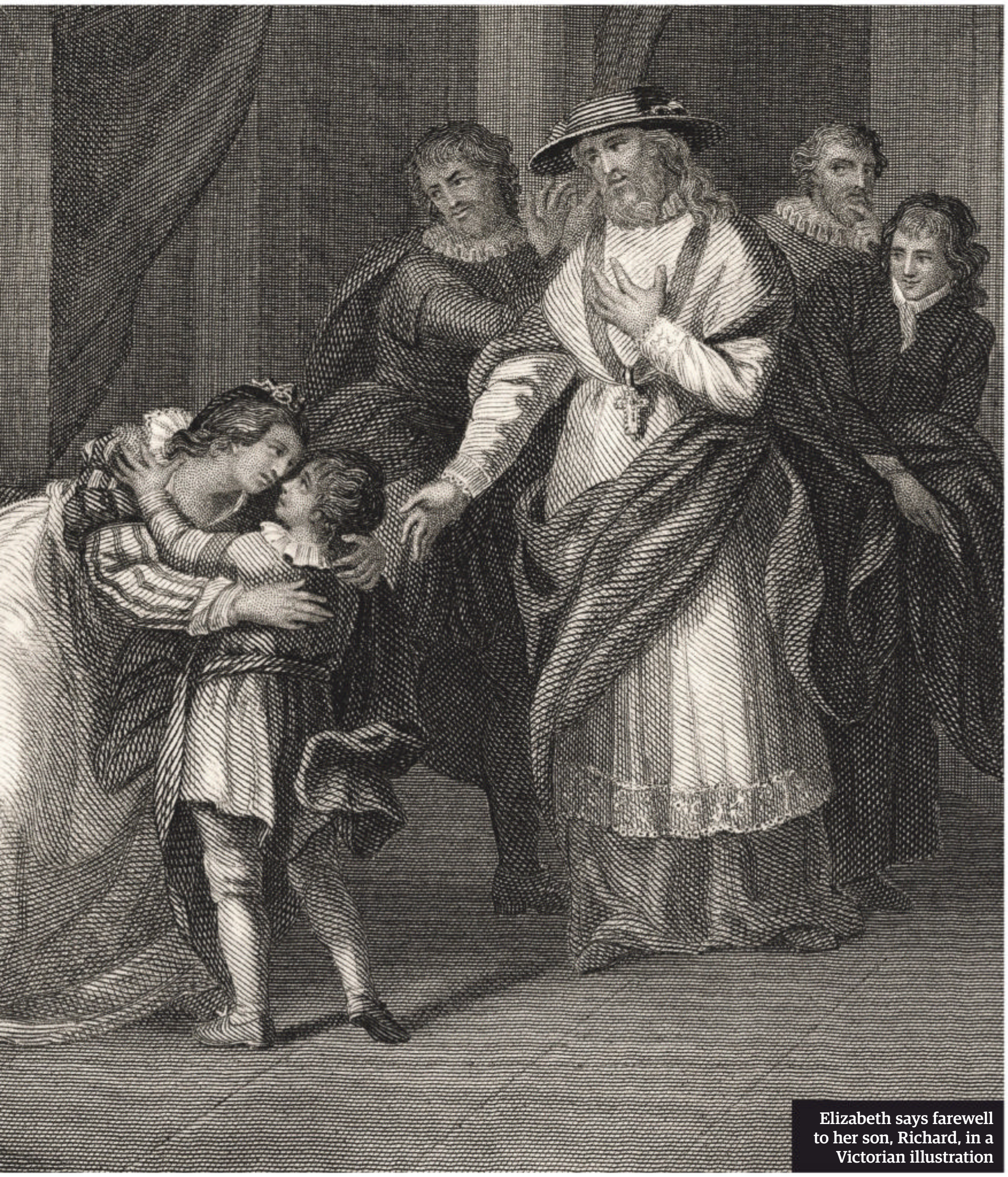
Consecrated host

The power of this vital element of the Holy Communion service was highly prized in the Medieval world, making it a much sought-after ingredient for a variety of magical purposes including love spells. Difficult to procure, many inventive ways were devised to source a piece, with some resorting to keeping it under their tongue after it had been administered in church. Relevant words and incantations could then be written upon it depending on what was required.



A young man buys a love potion in this original etching from Molière's 17th-century comedy *L'amour Médecin* (*Dr Cupid*)

Looking at the evidence, however, it is unlikely indeed there was any truth in the accusations against Elizabeth and Jacquetta. Much has been made by some writers of Jacquetta's background and the family legend of descent from the mythical water spirit Melusine. It was through this connection, some say, that Jacquetta, and her daughter inherited their innate talent for witchcraft. It would not be a stretch to believe for her contemporaries – witchcraft, after all, was believed to run in families, passed down from mother to daughter across the generations, an idea that was likewise prevalent in the future witch trials of England. There is scant evidence, however, that either Jacquetta or Elizabeth held much stock in the family legend, and the fact of its existence



Elizabeth says farewell to her son, Richard, in a Victorian illustration

is not evidence in itself that they considered capitalising on the story to enhance their prospects.

Likewise, it has been asserted that Elizabeth and Edward were married on 1 May. Traditionally known as Beltane, it marks one of the most important dates of the pagan calendar and is deeply linked in the popular consciousness with witchcraft and ritual. There are even some accounts that have the king himself joining in the unearthly frolics, cavorting away the night before his marriage with Elizabeth, her mother, and their fellow witches. This is, of course, pure fabrication: true enough Edward was said to be exhausted after his wedding night, but there were no doubt more earthly and ultimately more satisfying explanations for that fact.

With the seeming suddenness and unexpected nature of the king's marriage, along with the less than positive response to the identity of his queen, it was perhaps easier for people to believe or to at least mutter about the possibility of mystical means being behind the match. Elizabeth attracted censure and hostility from the start; her good looks were much envied, and, combined with her lack of lands and titles when she caught the king's eye – she was in fact at that point the only Queen who had been plucked from the ranks of ordinary subjects to be crowned – she was in a prime position to find herself the subject of rumours and stories. She was also seen by some as a grabbing, haughty social upstart – a most unsuitable wife and queen for the King. Her mother was also seen as having too much influence, inspiring her daughter to not only snare the king in the first place, but also to secure advantageous positions and marriages for various members of their large family.

> "Elizabeth was schooled, perhaps by her mother, to wait there that day for Edward to ride past"

It is highly unlikely however, though a good a story it might make, that Elizabeth and her mother dabbled in witchcraft to bring about the advantageous marriage. If there was anything other than chance at play then it was the possibility that Elizabeth was schooled, perhaps by her mother, to wait there that day for Edward to ride past, but there is precious little evidence even for that level of intervention.

The allegations made against both Elizabeth and her mother are best viewed through the political lens of the day. Upon the unexpected death of Edward IV, there were two main contenders for power and influence – Edward's brother, Richard, Duke of Gloucester, and the Woodville faction headed by the Queen. The Woodvilles posed a direct threat to Richard, favouring rule by the whole council while the young Edward V was in his minority, Richard's role as protector that of name only rather than granting absolute control over the young and impressionable monarch. Quite simply, Richard wanted Elizabeth and her children disarmed and out of the way.

As for Richard's assertions that Elizabeth had withered his arm and stolen his breath, it is hardly surprising that he was unable or unwilling to carry these accusations further. Thomas More dismissed them as rubbish, citing Elizabeth's well-known dislike of Jane Shore as reason enough to dismiss the accusation of the two women working together, while also pointing out that, in his opinion, Elizabeth was far too clever to have embarked upon such an unwise course of action as dabbling in witchcraft.

Was Elizabeth a witch? The answer, from the evidence, would have to be no. Whatever one believes, the myth is, however, an enduring and popular one; the theory given renewed credence in recent literary and television adaptations of the story of Edward and Elizabeth that have proved that the idea is not going to fade any time soon.

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James VI and the Witches

After personal experience of black magic – or so he thought – James VI of Scotland waged a vigorous war against witchcraft

The fearful abounding at this time in this country, of these detestable slaves of the Devil, the Witches or enchanters, hath moved me (beloved reader) to dispatch in post, this following treatise of mine, not in any way (as I protest) to serve for a show of my learning and ingenuity, but only (moved of conscience) to press thereby, so far as I can, to resolve the doubting hearts of many; both that such assaults of Satan are most certainly practiced, and that the instruments thereof, merit most severely to be punished."

So began the preface to a remarkable book published in Edinburgh in 1597. *Daemonologie* was remarkable for two reasons: it was a product of the most serious witch mania ever to erupt in Britain, and it was written by a reigning British monarch. What prompted the King of Scotland to venture, personally, into the campaign against black magic? There seem to be three causes that impelled him to take up his pen.

The first and most deep-seated was James's belief in his own intellectual talent. He was a natural scholar, inquisitive, well-read and argumentative, and had a particular fascination for theology, believing that, as a king and savant, he had a responsibility to impart wisdom to his people. Secondly, he deemed himself to have been the object of a specific satanic attack in 1589, something that made a deep impression on him. Thirdly, he was always on the watch for treason and maintained that potential enemies of the crown were motivated by demonic forces.

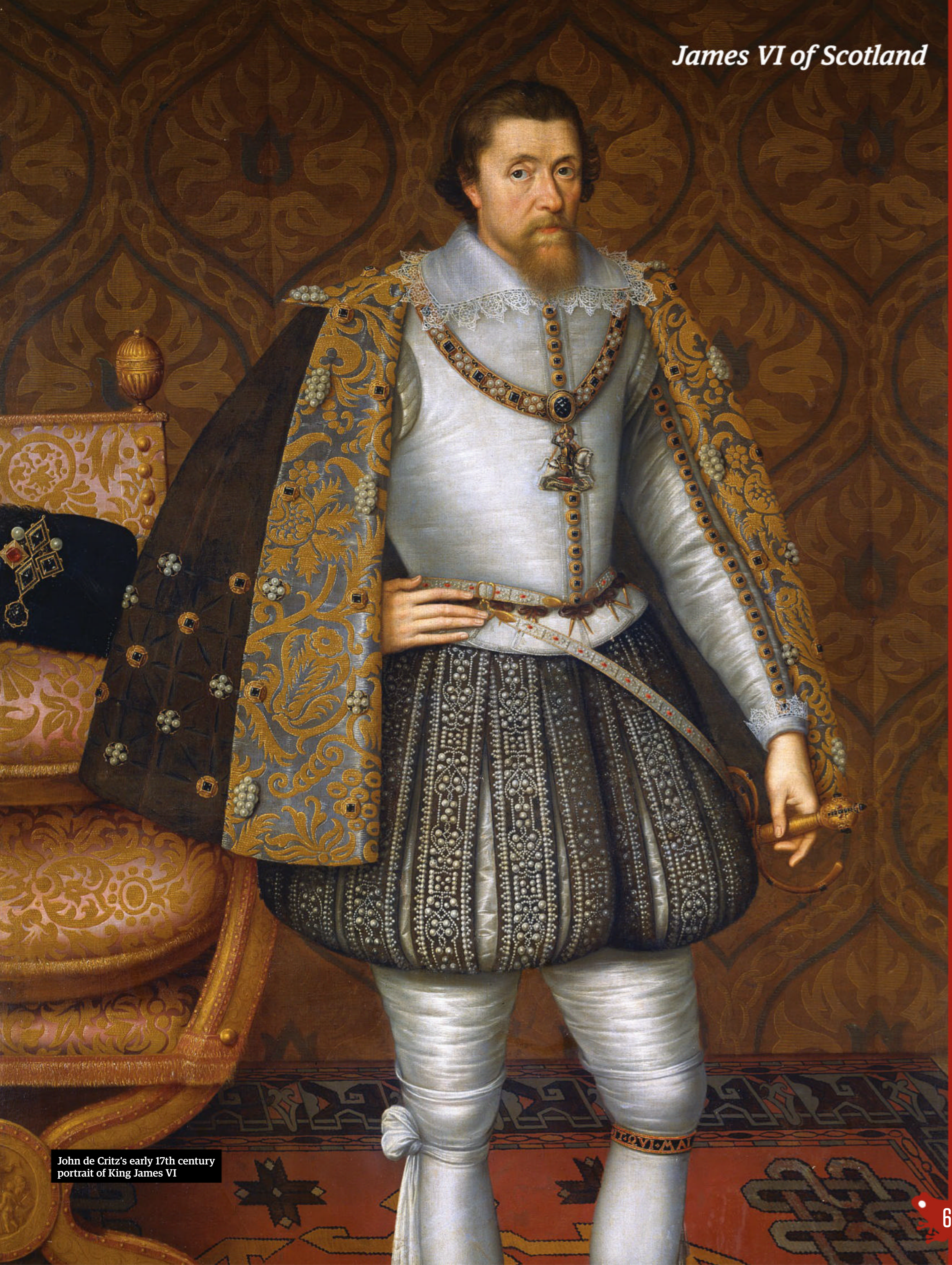
James Stuart was King of Scotland from the age of one. His mother, Mary, Queen of Scots, was forced to abdicate in July 1567 and the boy, therefore, had no pattern of kingship on which to model himself. His upbringing was entrusted to a succession of regents from warring factions and he was subjected to a rigid educational regime by tutors of whom the chief was the gifted but irascible Presbyterian, George Buchanan. By his

James VI of Scotland

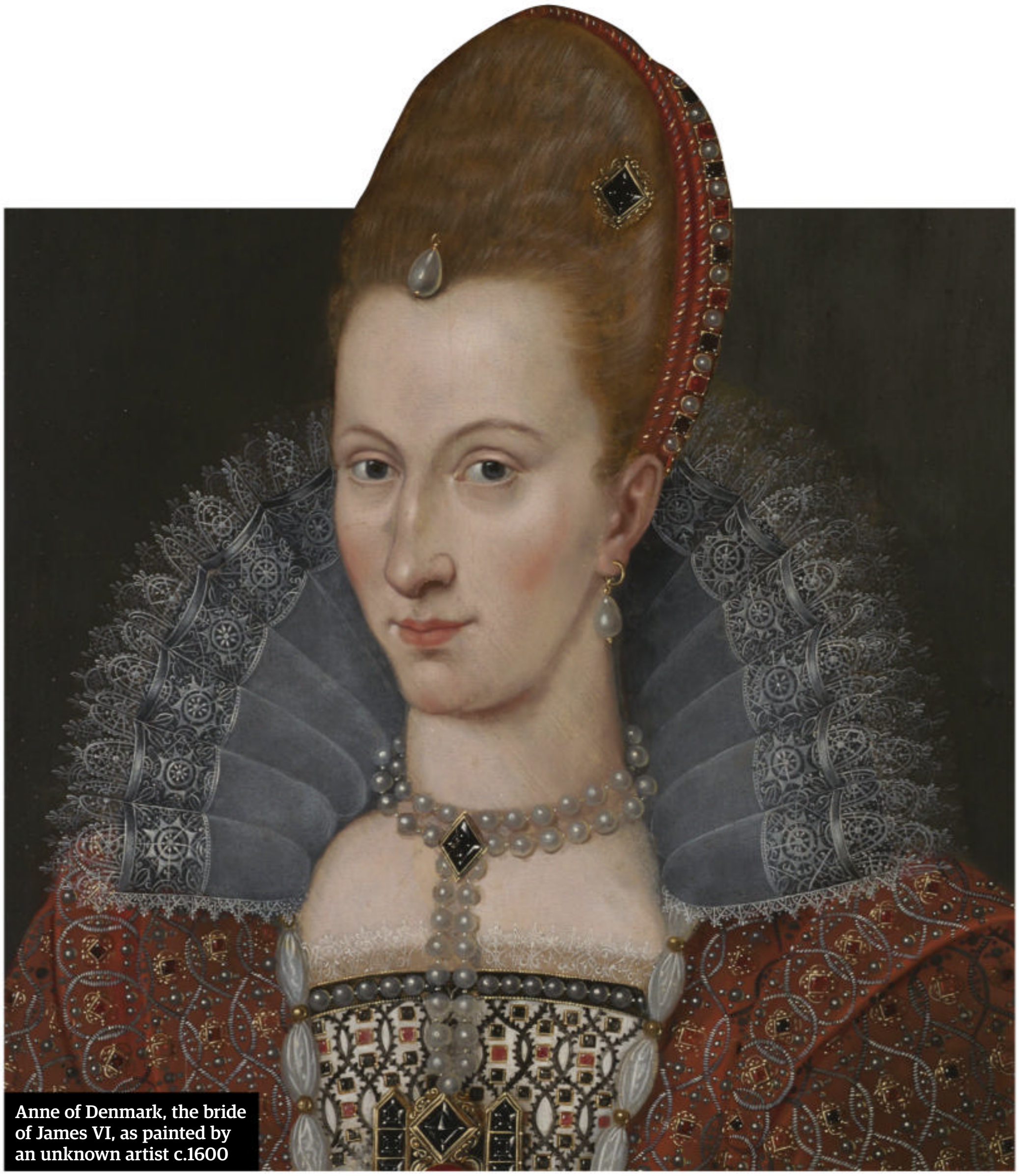
b.1566-d.1625

♛ 1567-1625

Son of Mary, Queen of Scots and her second husband, Lord Darnley, James became king aged one after his mother was ousted. His reign was characterised by superstition. After the death of Elizabeth I of England, he became king of England in 1603.



John de Critz's early 17th century portrait of King James VI



Anne of Denmark, the bride of James VI, as painted by an unknown artist c.1600

mid-teens, James had mastered Latin, Greek and French and was thoroughly grounded in the Bible and Calvinist doctrine. His undoubted academic ability was coupled with a profound sense of his divine right as ruler, so his opinions had the support (as he believed) not only of reason, but also of God.

Belief in and fear of witchcraft had roots in folk religion and both Catholic and Protestant theology. For centuries in Europe, it had been generally assumed that the exponents of magic were divided into two groups: there were wise women and men (wise-ards or wizards) who were experts in herbal remedies and practised benign 'white' magic, and those who turned to maleficium, black magic, which brought misfortune on its victims. Then, in the 1480s, the situation changed drastically. The Catholic Church, increasingly embroiled in a war with heretics of various kinds, changed the definition of witchcraft. The focus was no longer on the good or bad effects produced by magical means but on the origin of the powers claimed by witches and wizards. Pope Innocent VIII decreed that such people had made a pact with Satan or his agents. If found guilty by an ecclesiastical court, these enemies of God were to be handed over to the secular authorities for execution – usually by burning in continental Europe. An officially approved handbook, the *Malleus Maleficarum*, was published, which gave details of how witches could be identified and how they should be investigated (a process including torture). Rolling off the new printing presses in great numbers, it became a bestseller and by 1600 it had gone through 28 editions. Its description of witchcraft was one of the very few topics on which Catholics and Protestants agreed during the Reformation, and the result was outbreaks of witch mania and the execution of thousands of victims, most of whom were women.

> "Leading Lutheran theologians were totally committed to the concept of spiritual warfare"

However, persecution was not universal: the British Isles was one area that largely escaped the frenzy and the *Malleus Maleficarum* was not translated into English. That is not to say that the governments in Westminster and Edinburgh were not concerned with the problem – witchcraft acts were passed in both parliaments in 1563, but the one drafted north of the border was more draconian and classed both the practice of witchcraft and the consulting of witches as capital offences. However, over the next 25 years there were few prosecutions and even fewer actual convictions. This was the situation when the complex events of 1587-91 began.

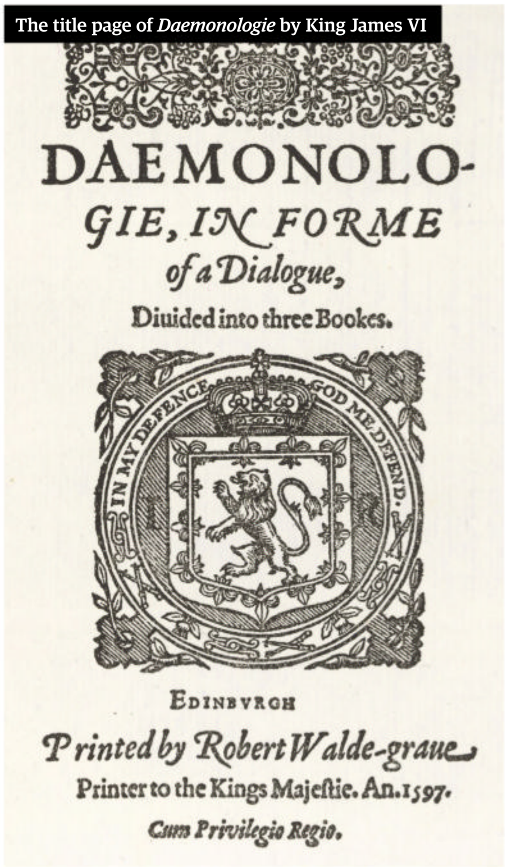
James's rule was still rendered precarious by faction fighting among the Scottish nobles. Prominent among them was Francis Hepburn, Earl of Bothwell (c.1562-1612) who, as an illegitimate son of James V, was the stepbrother of James's mother, Mary, Queen of Scots. Mary had for many years been enjoying the 'hospitality' of Elizabeth I and had been the focus of several plots against the English queen, who reluctantly ordered her execution in February 1587. Bothwell was outraged and campaigned vigorously for a war of revenge, but was indignant to discover that James had no taste for such a conflict.

In the following year, the earl saw another opportunity for his anti-English policy: the Spanish Armada, having failed to invade England, was being forced north, around the Scottish coast. James appointed Bothwell to the post of Lord Admiral with instructions to attack the Spanish vessels, but the earl had other ideas. He planned

to enlist the support of King Philip's ships and men in a secondary attack on England. His plot involved raising his own armed force, alliances with Catholic nobles on both sides of the border and messages to Madrid. When the scheme fell apart, James had its ringleader imprisoned but, with remarkable, even foolhardy, forbearance, be restored Bothwell to favour in September 1589. The king had something more important to think about - he was about to marry a Danish princess. It is with the arrangements for his wedding to Anne, sister of Christian IV of Denmark, that our story takes a bizarre twist - involving witchcraft.

The 15-year-old princess set out from Copenhagen in a convoy bound for Edinburgh, but severe storms forced them to head for shelter on the Norwegian coast. There was nothing unusual about autumnal gales in this region, but James felt that he was being balked and set off in October to fetch his bride himself. He spent six months at the Danish court, where he hugely relished intellectual debate with the scholars and clergy who enjoyed royal patronage. What he encountered was what we would now consider a strange mixture of superstition and science. The leading Lutheran theologians were totally committed to the concept of spiritual warfare being waged between the forces of good and evil and had a well-developed demonology based on the Bible and the *Malleus Maleficarum*. Their understanding of witchcraft was not confined to theory. So great was the threat

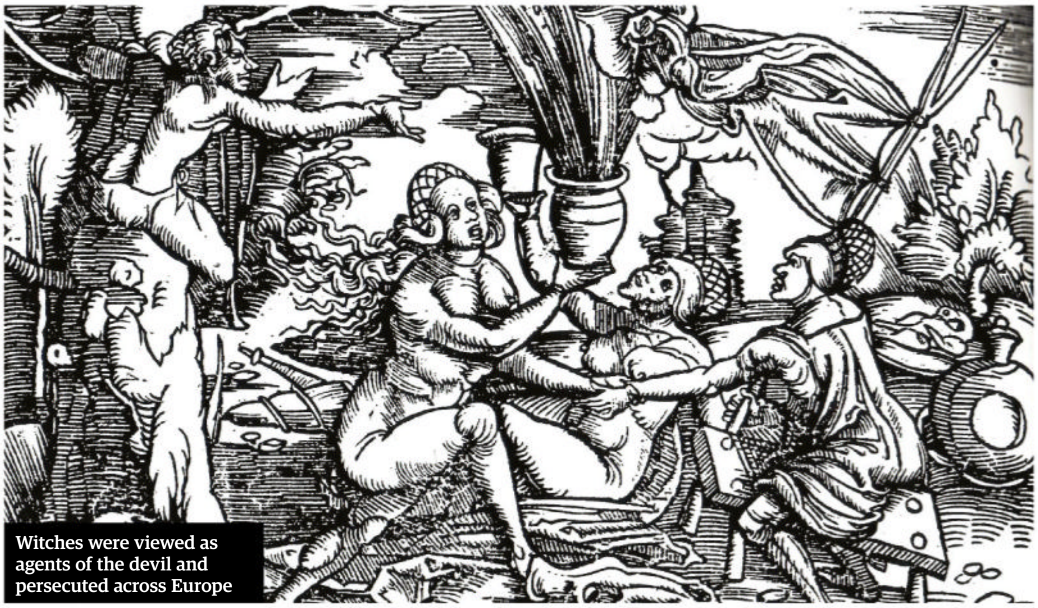
The title page of *Daemonologie* by King James VI



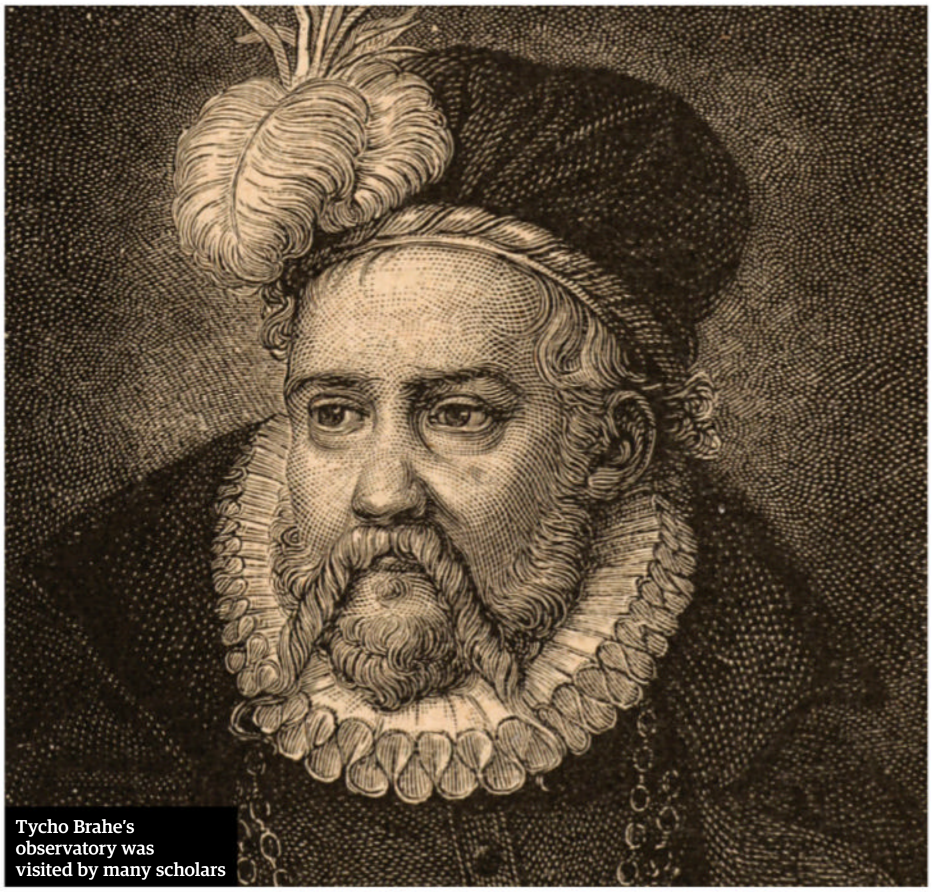
DAEMONOLOGIE, IN FORME
of a Dialogue,
Diuided into three Bookes.

IN MY DEFENCE GOD ME DEFEND.
I R

EDINBVRGH
Printed by Robert Walde-graue
Printer to the Kings Majeſtie. An. 1597.
Cum Privilegio Regio.



Witches were viewed as agents of the devil and persecuted across Europe



Tycho Brahe's observatory was visited by many scholars

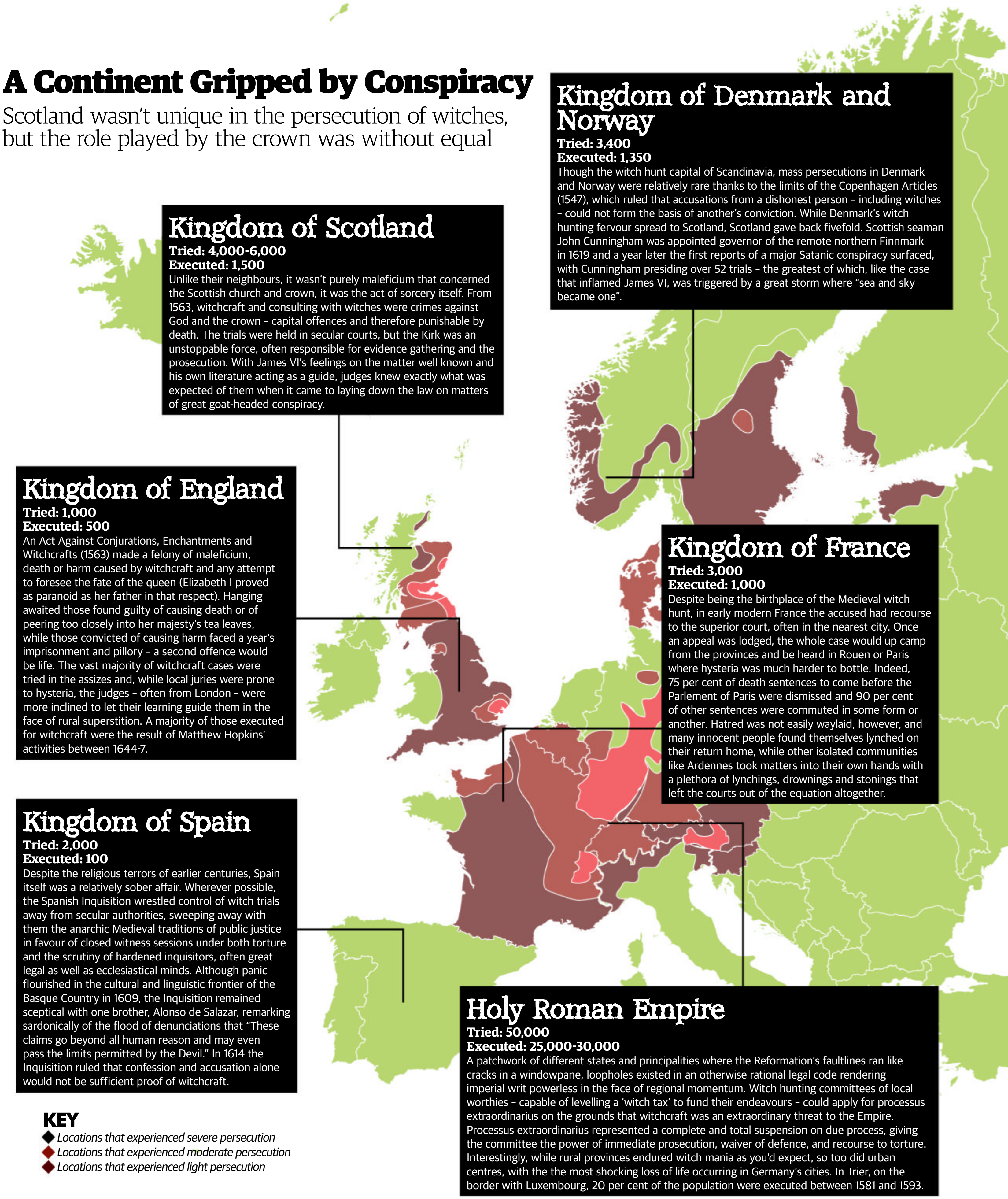
The King's Idol

Meet the man who James VI saw as his intellectual equal

James could scarcely avoid being impressed by Tycho Brahe (1546-1601). As well as being famous as one of the leading experimental scientists of the age, he was a colourful extrovert who wore a metal sheath over his nose to cover an old fencing scar, threw lavish parties and kept an elk as an indoor pet. Brahe had an elaborate research complex, which included a laboratory, an observatory, a library and a workshop for the manufacture of astronomical instruments. He made thousands of observations and calculations about the movement of heavenly bodies, which he believed important principally for the casting of accurate horoscopes. Though at the cutting edge of scientific research, Brahe was wedded to Lutheran beliefs about demonology. James must have been delighted that the opinions of this celebrity matched his own.

A Continent Gripped by Conspiracy

Scotland wasn't unique in the persecution of witches, but the role played by the crown was without equal



Kingdom of Scotland

Tried: 4,000-6,000
Executed: 1,500

Unlike their neighbours, it wasn't purely maleficium that concerned the Scottish church and crown, it was the act of sorcery itself. From 1563, witchcraft and consulting with witches were crimes against God and the crown – capital offences and therefore punishable by death. The trials were held in secular courts, but the Kirk was an unstoppable force, often responsible for evidence gathering and the prosecution. With James VI's feelings on the matter well known and his own literature acting as a guide, judges knew exactly what was expected of them when it came to laying down the law on matters of great goat-headed conspiracy.

Kingdom of Denmark and Norway

Tried: 3,400
Executed: 1,350

Though the witch hunt capital of Scandinavia, mass persecutions in Denmark and Norway were relatively rare thanks to the limits of the Copenhagen Articles (1547), which ruled that accusations from a dishonest person – including witches – could not form the basis of another's conviction. While Denmark's witch hunting fervour spread to Scotland, Scotland gave back fivefold. Scottish seaman John Cunningham was appointed governor of the remote northern Finnmark in 1619 and a year later the first reports of a major Satanic conspiracy surfaced, with Cunningham presiding over 52 trials – the greatest of which, like the case that inflamed James VI, was triggered by a great storm where "sea and sky became one".

Kingdom of England

Tried: 1,000
Executed: 500

An Act Against Conjurations, Enchantments and Witchcrafts (1563) made a felony of maleficium, death or harm caused by witchcraft and any attempt to foresee the fate of the queen (Elizabeth I proved as paranoid as her father in that respect). Hanging awaited those found guilty of causing death or of peering too closely into her majesty's tea leaves, while those convicted of causing harm faced a year's imprisonment and pillory – a second offence would be life. The vast majority of witchcraft cases were tried in the assizes and, while local juries were prone to hysteria, the judges – often from London – were more inclined to let their learning guide them in the face of rural superstition. A majority of those executed for witchcraft were the result of Matthew Hopkins' activities between 1644-7.

Kingdom of France

Tried: 3,000
Executed: 1,000

Despite being the birthplace of the Medieval witch hunt, in early modern France the accused had recourse to the superior court, often in the nearest city. Once an appeal was lodged, the whole case would up camp from the provinces and be heard in Rouen or Paris where hysteria was much harder to bottle. Indeed, 75 per cent of death sentences to come before the Parlement of Paris were dismissed and 90 per cent of other sentences were commuted in some form or another. Hatred was not easily waylaid, however, and many innocent people found themselves lynched on their return home, while other isolated communities like Ardennes took matters into their own hands with a plethora of lynchings, drownings and stonings that left the courts out of the equation altogether.

Kingdom of Spain

Tried: 2,000
Executed: 100

Despite the religious terrors of earlier centuries, Spain itself was a relatively sober affair. Wherever possible, the Spanish Inquisition wrestled control of witch trials away from secular authorities, sweeping away with them the anarchic Medieval traditions of public justice in favour of closed witness sessions under both torture and the scrutiny of hardened inquisitors, often great legal as well as ecclesiastical minds. Although panic flourished in the cultural and linguistic frontier of the Basque Country in 1609, the Inquisition remained sceptical with one brother, Alonso de Salazar, remarking sardonically of the flood of denunciations that "These claims go beyond all human reason and may even pass the limits permitted by the Devil." In 1614 the Inquisition ruled that confession and accusation alone would not be sufficient proof of witchcraft.

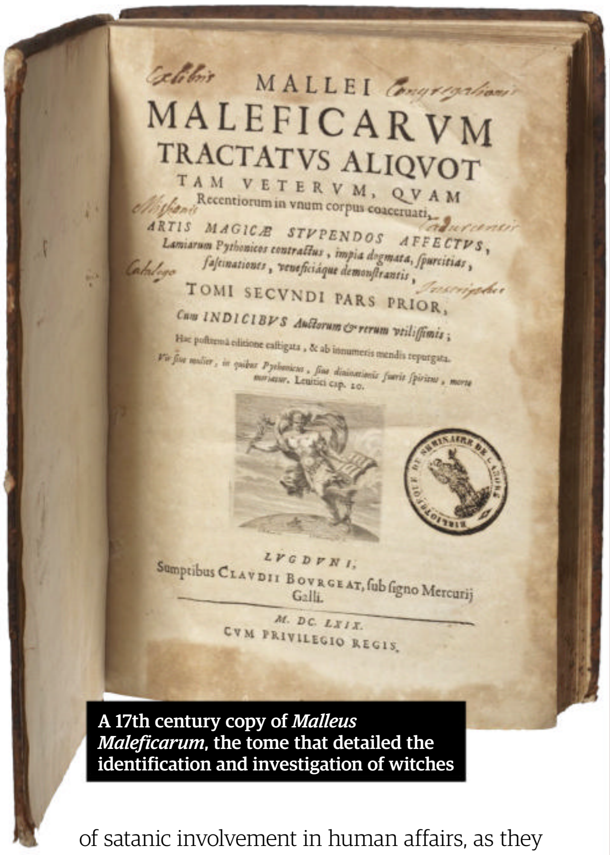
Holy Roman Empire

Tried: 50,000
Executed: 25,000-30,000

A patchwork of different states and principalities where the Reformation's faultlines ran like cracks in a windowpane, loopholes existed in an otherwise rational legal code rendering imperial writ powerless in the face of regional momentum. Witch hunting committees of local worthies – capable of levelling a 'witch tax' to fund their endeavours – could apply for processus extraordinarius on the grounds that witchcraft was an extraordinary threat to the Empire. Processus extraordinarius represented a complete and total suspension on due process, giving the committee the power of immediate prosecution, waiver of defence, and recourse to torture. Interestingly, while rural provinces endured witch mania as you'd expect, so too did urban centres, with the the most shocking loss of life occurring in Germany's cities. In Trier, on the border with Luxembourg, 20 per cent of the population were executed between 1581 and 1593.

KEY

- ◆ *Locations that experienced severe persecution*
- ◆ *Locations that experienced moderate persecution*
- ◆ *Locations that experienced light persecution*



Exlibris MALLEI Congregationis
MALEFICARVM
TRACTATVS ALIQVOT
TAM VETERVM, QVAM
Missionis Recentiorum in vnum corpus coaceruati, [illegible]
ARTIS MAGICÆ STVPENDOS AFFECTVS,
Lamiarum Pythonicos contractus, impia dogmata, ſpurcitias,
Catalogo faſtinationes, veneficiáque demonſtrantis, Inscriptus
TOMI SECVNDI PARS PRIOR,
Cum INDICIBVS Auctorum & rerum vtiliſſimis;
Hæc poſtremâ editione caſtigata, & ab innumeris mendis repurgata.
Vir ſiue mulier, in quibus Pythonicus, ſiue diuinationis fuerit ſpiritus, morte moriatur. Leuitici cap. 20.

LVGDVNI,
Sumptibus CLAVDII BOVRGEAT, ſub ſigno Mercurij Galli.

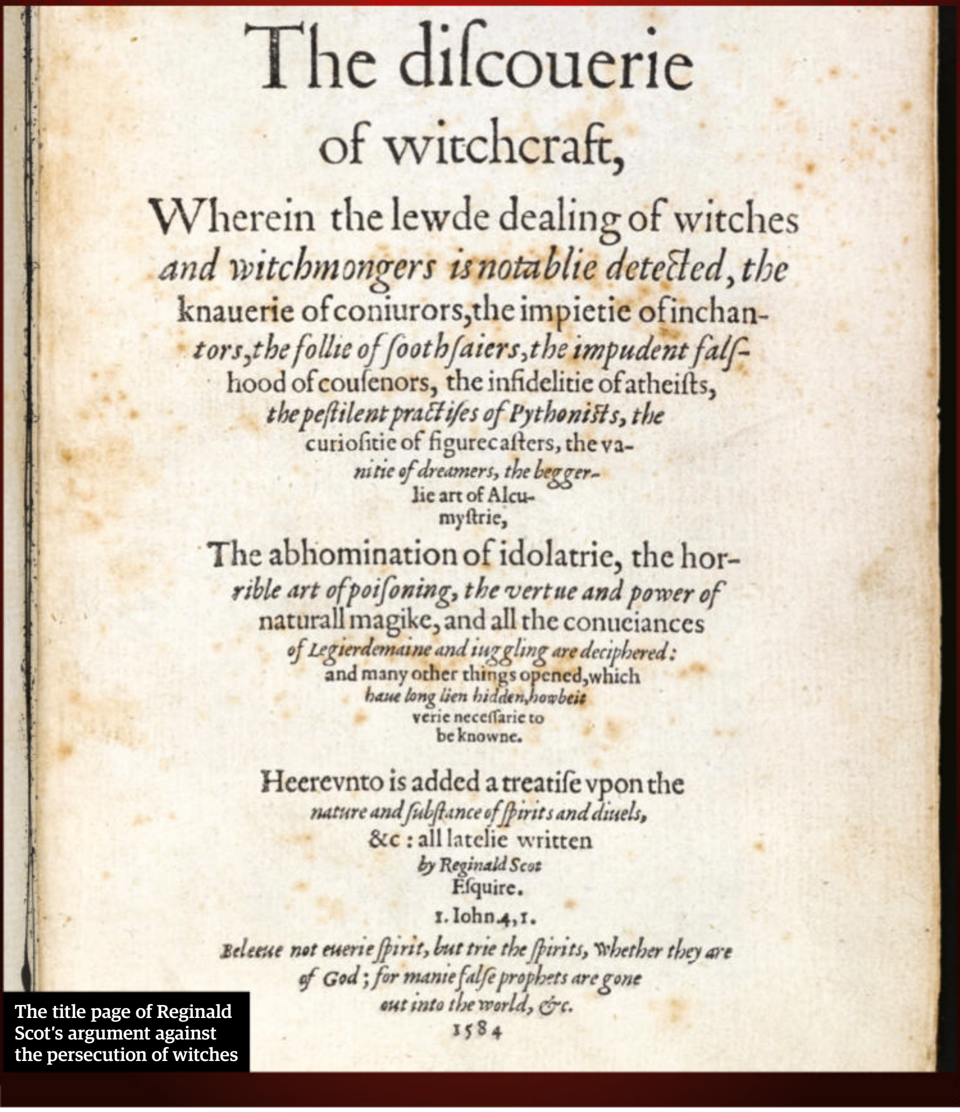
M. DC. LXIX.
CVM PRIVILEGIO REGIS.

A 17th century copy of *Malleus Maleficarum*, the tome that detailed the identification and investigation of witches

The Witch Redeemer

Not everyone supported the idea of witch hunting

Reginald Scot (c.1538-1599) is one of the many 'solid' citizens of independent but quiet demeanour who formed the backbone of Tudor England. He was a landowner with modest estates in Kent, did his stint as a Justice of the Peace and served as an MP for New Romney in the Armada year. He wrote two books, both remarkable for being well-informed and commonsensical. The first (1576) was a manual on hop-growing, but his more original work was *The Discoverie Of Witchcraft Wherein The Lewd Dealing Of Witches And Witchmongers Is Notablie Detected* (1584). Scot was appalled by the persecution of supposed witches and set out to prove from a variety of authorities, ancient and contemporary, that belief in 'magic' was contrary to scripture and reason. As well as denouncing witch trials, his book provided a compendious list of common beliefs and practices involving spells, alchemy and fraud, as well as the behaviour of witches. Small wonder that King James found Scot's work pernicious.



The diſcouerie
of witchcraft,
Wherein the lewde dealing of witches
and witchmongers is notablie detected, the
knauerie of coniurors, the impietie of inchan-
tors, the follie of ſoothſaiers, the impudent falſ-
hood of couſenors, the infidelitie of atheiſts,
the peſtilent practiſes of Pythoniſts, the
curioſitie of figurecaſters, the va-
nitie of dreamers, the begger-
lie art of Alcu-
myſtrie,
The abhomination of idolatrie, the hor-
rible art of poiſoning, the vertue and power of
naturall magike, and all the conueiances
of Legierdemaine and iuggling are deciphered:
and many other things opened, which
haue long lien hidden, howbeit
verie neceſſarie to
be knowne.

Heerevnto is added a treatiſe vpon the
nature and ſubſtance of ſpirits and diuels,
&c: all latelie written
by Reginald Scot
Eſquire.
1. Iohn 4, 1.
Beleeue not euerie ſpirit, but trie the ſpirits, whether they are
of God; for manie falſe prophets are gone
out into the world, &c.
1584

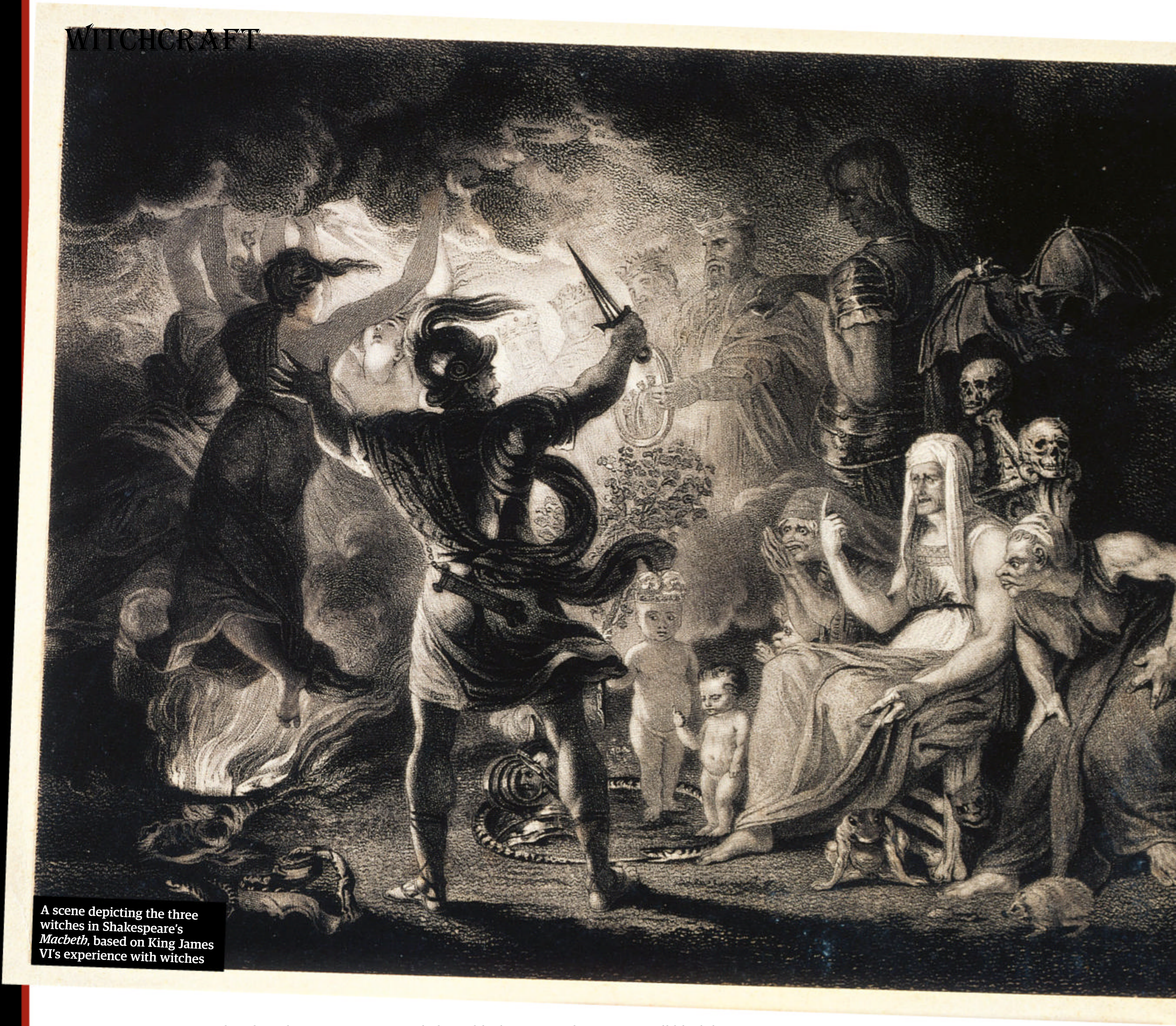
The title page of Reginald Scot's argument against the persecution of witches

of satanic involvement in human affairs, as they believed, that they were ever on the watch for people who had made a pact with the devil.

Also present at the Danish court were free-thinking philosopher-scientists, foremost among whom was the royal astrologer, Tycho Brahe, who was at the forefront of European study of the movement of heavenly bodies. James, who regarded himself as an academic, was in his element among some of the sophisticated leaders of European thought. He integrated his new insights into his inherited pattern of belief and thought to form a philosophy of his own.

Fundamental to his understanding of sovereignty was his conviction that kings were God's anointed representatives. It followed, therefore, that those who opposed the king opposed God and were thus agents of the devil - an idea that applied to treason and also to witchcraft. James now "saw clearly" that the storms that had stopped Anne's voyage to Scotland had been whipped up by those wielding satanic power, a view that was confirmed when his own return home in May 1590 was also hampered by foul weather. Whether he would have taken any action on his own initiative is not clear but, within weeks, news arrived from Denmark that made up his mind for him. The political situation there was similar to the one that had existed a few years earlier in Scotland: squabbling nobles governing the country in the name of an underage king. In the summer of 1590, the chief minister was charged by his rivals with various offences, including endangering the life of Princess Anne by sending her to sea in a poorly equipped ship. He countered by asserting that the near shipwreck had been caused by witches, leading to the arrest of several women and the eventual execution of at least a dozen of them. Under torture, some told their interrogators what they wanted to hear. However, some, if the records are to be believed, needed no pressure to confess to the most bizarre activities and the possession of arcane powers. They enjoyed the celebrity of being thought to have supernatural gifts and claimed to have met with Satan and received authority from him to send devils aboard the royal ships to steer them to near-disaster.

James needed no further incentive to set in motion his own witch hunt on his side of the water - this was the point at which Scottish politics and superstition came together. In his desire to discover the likely outcome of his schemes, Bothwell had resorted to witches who claimed clairvoyant gifts. When this became known to his opponents, the



A scene depicting the three witches in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, based on King James VI's experience with witches

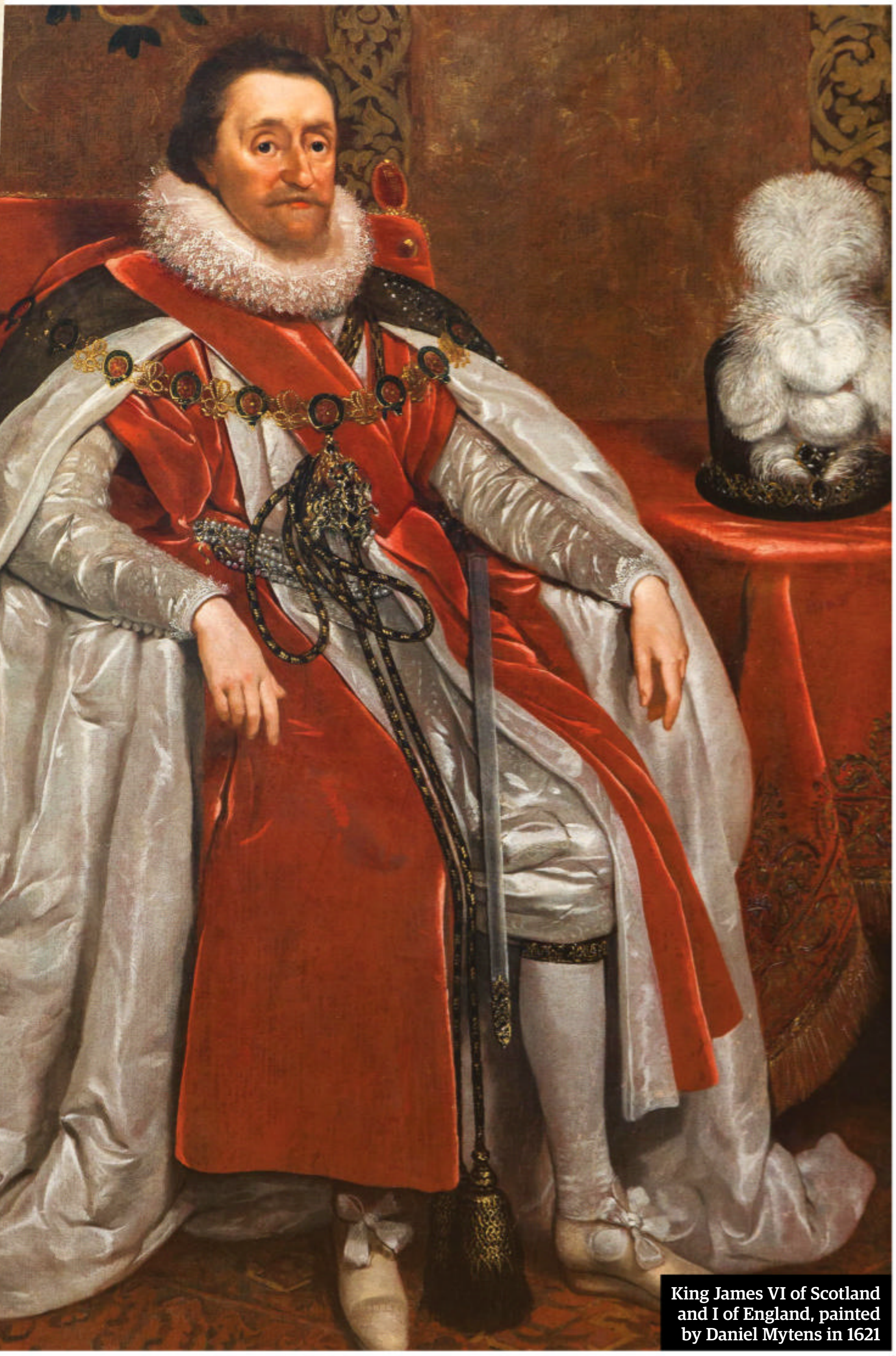
practitioners were arrested and, under examination, they accused the earl of bribing them to use their powers to kill the king by raising storms to overwhelm the royal fleet. Treason and maleficium thus merged to present James with a terrifying combination of natural and supernatural forces. Troops loyal to the king pursued Bothwell – now in open rebellion – but, despite many encounters, the earl escaped to the continent in 1595 and spent the rest of his life in exile.

Meanwhile, the more sensational aspect of the affair became the trial of a coven of witches at North Berwick. James attended some of the investigations and heard the main suspects describe their meetings with the prince of darkness. Satan, they averred, had held court in the Auld Kirk at North Berwick, sitting in the pulpit, clad in a black gown and wearing a tall black hat. His beak-like nose and glowing eyes gave him a frightening aspect and 200 of his devotees had arrived, some flying through the air, eager to do his bidding. According to the records, James was initially sceptical about all this but was convinced when, according to a contemporary report, one of the prime suspects, Agnes Sampson (later strangled and burned for her crimes), told him:

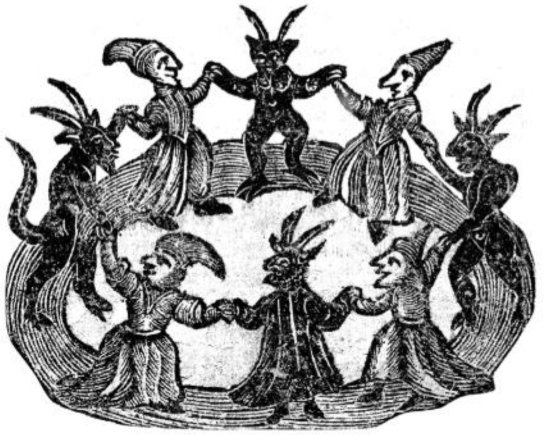
> *...the very words which passed between the King's Majesty and his Queen at Upslo in Norway the first night of marriage, with the answers each to other, whereat the King's Majesty wondered greatly, and swore by the living God, that he believed all the devils in hell could not have discovered the same, acknowledging her words to be more true, and therefore gave the more credit to the rest...*

James may also have been swayed by the flattering testimony, which, according to the accused, came directly from Satan's own mouth. When asked why his efforts to harm the king had so far proved ineffective, the archfiend replied: "He is a man of God. He does no wrong wittingly, but is inclined to all godliness, justice and virtue." This played directly to James's belief in the holy nature of his calling – there could be no greater proof of this than the testimony of God's primary adversary.

One aspect of the unspeakable tortures to which the original suspects were subjected was this 'revealing' of other offenders against the 1563 Act. Detainees turned informer in the hope of appeasing their interrogators, so that accusations and arrests rippled outward from the centre until more than



King James VI of Scotland and I of England, painted by Daniel Mytens in 1621



100 suspects had been rounded up. For all the fear engendered by these cases, it is interesting to note that juries were not always quick to deliver guilty verdicts. Equally interesting is the king's angry reaction when a witch was acquitted. Since treason and witchcraft were inextricably bound in his thinking, a lenient judgement was akin to disloyalty. He pointed out to the "misguided" jurors how close to death he had been brought by demonic agency and declared that he would continue to oppose the devil and all his works:

> *...for the good of this country, which enjoyeth peace by my life ... as I have thus begun, so propose I to go forward; not because I am James Stuart and can command so many thousands of men, but because God hath made me a king and judge to judge righteous judgement...*

True to his word, James gave his subjects the benefit of his further wisdom on witchcraft in a slender volume entitled *Daemonologie* in 1597. To the modern reader this book may seem idiosyncratic, but it very much caught the mood of the times. Only a decade earlier, an anonymous German author had regaled his readers with a cautionary tale, *Historia Von D. Johann Fausten*, about a scholar who made a pact with the devil and, at about the same time that *Daemonologie* appeared, Christopher Marlowe rendered the *Historia* into a play: *The Tragical History Of The Life And Death Of Doctor Faustus,* which was performed by the Admiral's Men. However, not everyone was caught up in the witch craze. James's principal target was Reginald Scot, a down-to-earth Kentish gentleman who, in 1584, had sought to explode the whole concept of magic in his book *The Discoverie Of Witchcraft*.

Using the device of a dialogue, the king draws upon the Bible and folklore in his exploration of the heavenly warfare of spiritual forces. But his main interest continues to be in witches, how they can be recognised and how they must be exterminated, and he has a warning for magistrates:

> *...to spare the life and not to strike when God bids strike and so severely punish ... so odious a fault and treason against God ... is not only unlawful but doubtless no less sin in that magistrate...*

On the death of Elizabeth I in 1603, the English crown was offered to James, who became monarch of both kingdoms. Thereafter, many more exciting and interesting opportunities were opened to him and he gradually abandoned his mission against witches. In 1606, Shakespeare's *Macbeth* was performed at Hampton Court as a celebration of the king's Scottish ancestry, but also a nod towards his campaign against satanic activity. It is inconceivable that when three witches were introduced near the beginning of the play, James would not have recognised certain allusions in the dialogue. The crones discuss how they will attack the captain of a ship bound for Aleppo:

Second Witch: I'll give thee a wind
Third Witch: And I another
First Witch: I myself have all the other.
And the very ports [from which] they blow ...
I'll drain him dry as hay.
Sleep shall neither night nor day
Hang upon his penthouse lid ...
Weary seven nights nine times nine
Shall he dwindle, peak and pine.
Though his bark cannot be lost,
Yet it shall be tempest-tossed ...

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DAY IN THE LIFE

A Scottish Witch-pricker

Making a profession out of testing for witches, Scotland, 1648-77

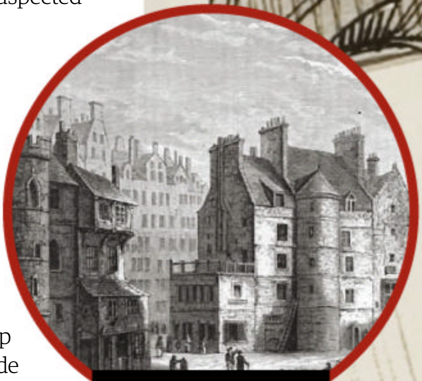
In Scotland, it was believed that when a witch made her - or his - pact with the devil, a mark was left to show that God and baptism had been renounced and that the witch belonged to Satan. These marks were identifiable if, when 'pricked', they did not bleed or cause pain. Initially carried out by ministers, the role was later taken by on by men who became known as professional prickers. The influence and prestige of this vocation started to decline from 1677 onwards, as a gradual shift in opinion led to growing questioning of their skills and authority.

Early rise

Although a witch pricker could find plenty of work in their local area, this was not always the case. They could have to travel considerable distance depending how far their reputation had spread and who was calling for their assistance. In one particular case, a Scottish pricker was summoned across the border to Newcastle to prick suspected witches there.

Gather equipment

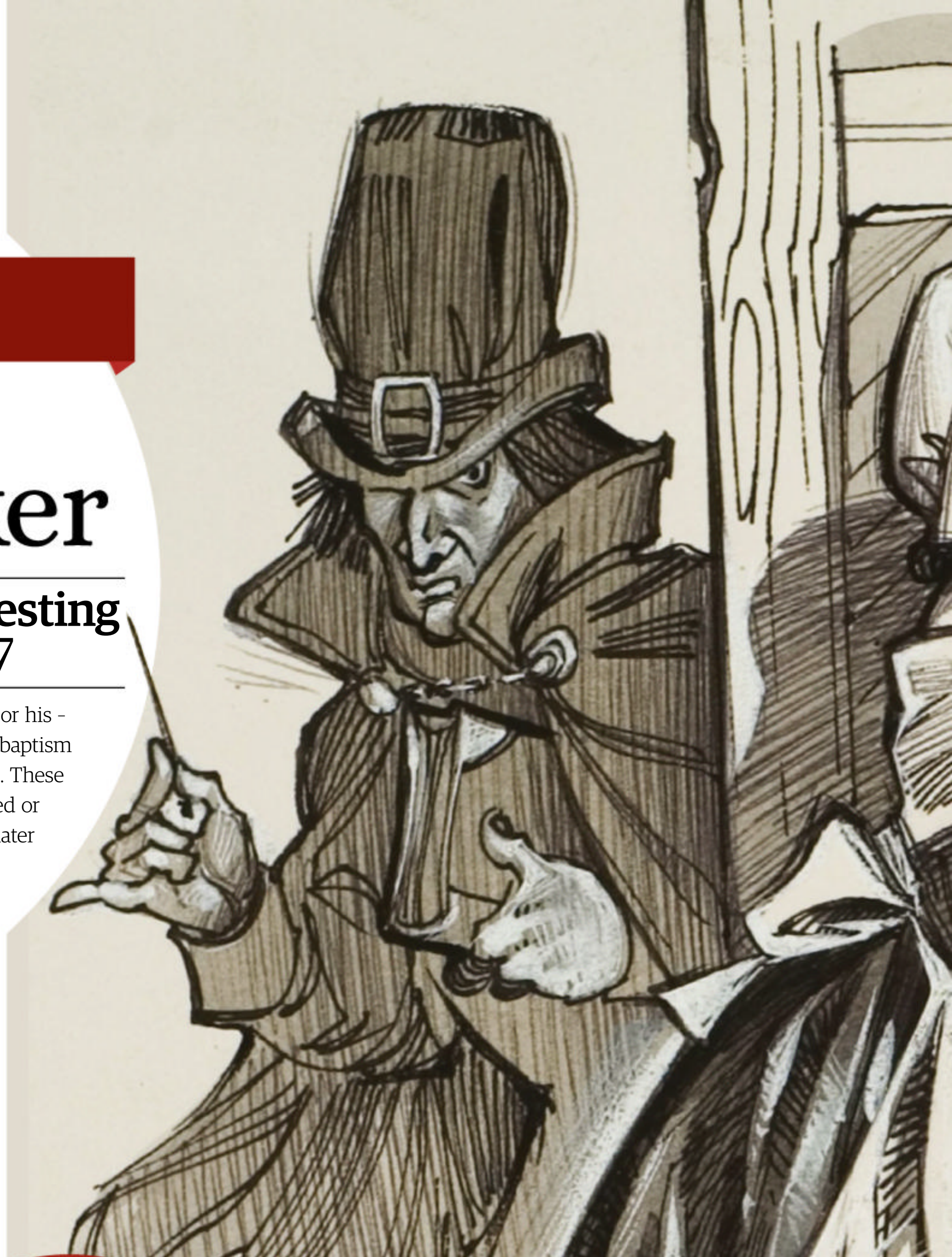
The main tool of the pricker's trade was the pin that gave him his name. Although often thought to have been a thick blade, contemporary sources refer consistently to a 'pin'-like tool, implying they used a long, thin and sharp instrument, often described as being made of brass and five to seven centimetres in length. Mention is also made of a retractable point that could be used to 'rig' results if necessary.



In Edinburgh, suspected witches were kept locked up at the Old Tolbooth until the witch-pricker could be summoned

Accept a bribe

The pricking usually took place where the prisoners were being held, either the local tollbooth or a room in a house set aside and secured for the purpose. A suspect might offer a bribe to ensure no marks would be found on them, or, in some cases, a pricker might accept money in order to incriminate a particular suspect.



The witch supposedly received the mark that would convict her from the devil

Prick the suspects

The pricking took place before witnesses, to satisfy curiosity and to keep things ostensibly above board. The humiliating experience involved the accused being at least partially stripped, as the pricker stuck the pin into any marks on their body; some suspects even had their heads shaved to ensure none were missed. Pricking was quick, with sometimes 30 suspects pricked in a session.

Pronounce the verdict

If a mark was pricked and did not bleed and the suspect felt no pain, this was a sure sign it was indeed from the devil and that the accused had very probably made a pact with Satan. If one or more such marks were found, the person was pronounced guilty, imprisoned and often executed.

Collect payment

Prickers were well paid for their work: John Kincaid was paid 20 merks (just over £1, or enough to buy 40 bread rolls) for pricking Bessie Masterton in 1649, and another pricker was paid 20 shillings per witch found guilty. This was an incentive for fraud that was clearly fatally exploited, one cause of the eventual unpopularity of the witch-pricker.

Avoid criticism

Prickers occupied a precarious position in society, and if complaints were made against one, they could find themselves in very hot water indeed. John Kincaid was arrested and imprisoned in 1662 after numerous complaints about him overstepping his position, and pricker George Cathie was likewise called before the authorities in 1650; in both cases, this brought to an end the man's pricking career.

Say your prayers

If they were lucky, a pricker's lodgings would be provided and the expenses of travel onwards paid for. Depending on the mood of the area, the pricker might also be invited to dine with the local minsters and other officials. Then it was early to bed, as a long journey and more witches lay ahead.

The witch-pricker could travel great distances to meet demand

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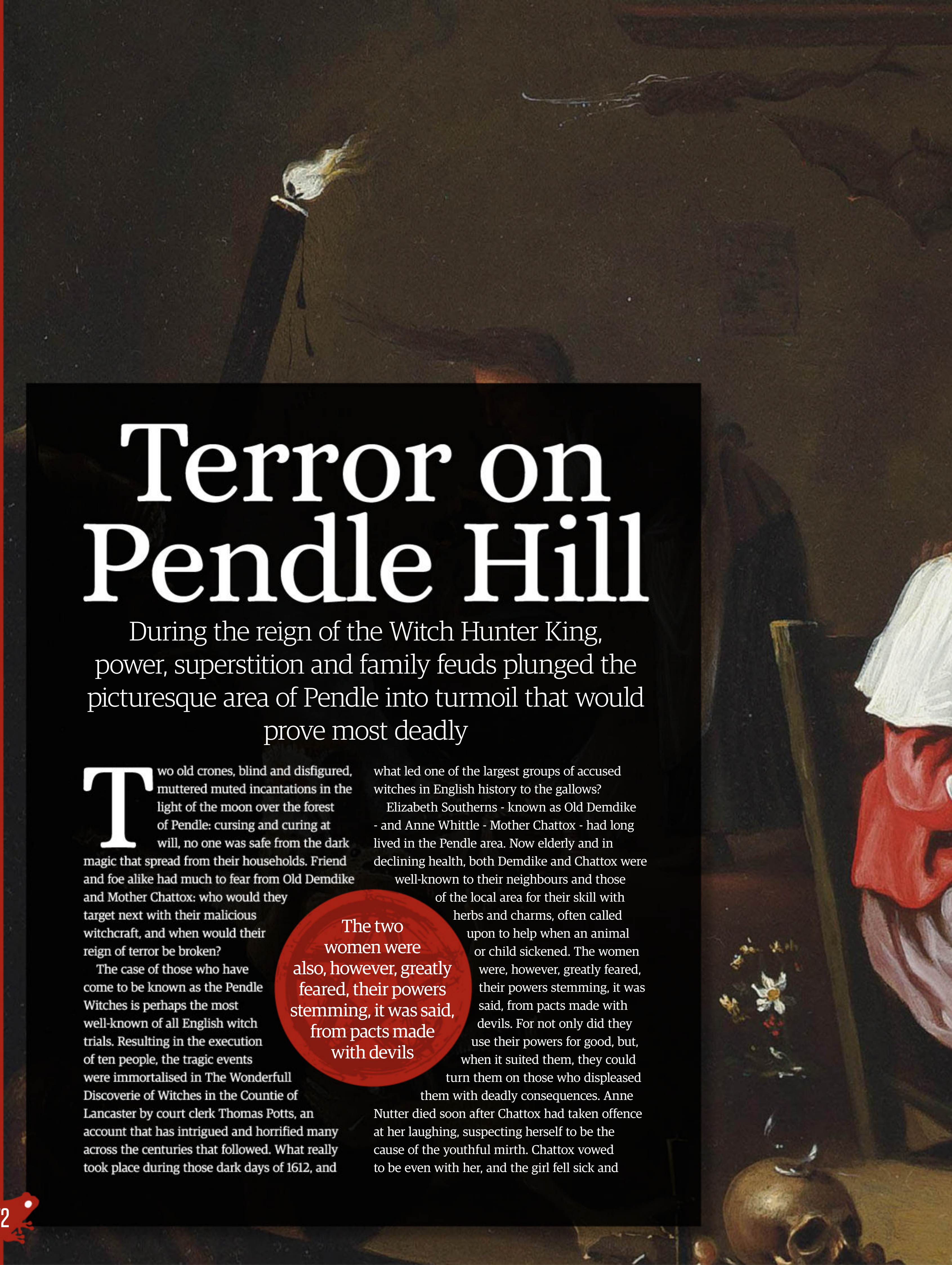


Terror on Pendle Hill

During the reign of the Witch Hunter King, power, superstition and family feuds plunged the picturesque area of Pendle into turmoil that would prove most deadly

Two old crones, blind and disfigured, muttered muted incantations in the light of the moon over the forest of Pendle: cursing and curing at will, no one was safe from the dark magic that spread from their households. Friend and foe alike had much to fear from Old Demdike and Mother Chattox: who would they target next with their malicious witchcraft, and when would their reign of terror be broken?

The case of those who have come to be known as the Pendle Witches is perhaps the most well-known of all English witch trials. Resulting in the execution of ten people, the tragic events were immortalised in The Wonderfull Discoverie of Witches in the Countie of Lancaster by court clerk Thomas Potts, an account that has intrigued and horrified many across the centuries that followed. What really took place during those dark days of 1612, and what led one of the largest groups of accused witches in English history to the gallows?

> The two women were also, however, greatly feared, their powers stemming, it was said, from pacts made with devils

Elizabeth Southerns - known as Old Demdike - and Anne Whittle - Mother Chattox - had long lived in the Pendle area. Now elderly and in declining health, both Demdike and Chattox were well-known to their neighbours and those of the local area for their skill with herbs and charms, often called upon to help when an animal or child sickened. The women were, however, greatly feared, their powers stemming, it was said, from pacts made with devils. For not only did they use their powers for good, but, when it suited them, they could turn them on those who displeased them with deadly consequences. Anne Nutter died soon after Chattox had taken offence at her laughing, suspecting herself to be the cause of the youthful mirth. Chattox vowed to be even with her, and the girl fell sick and

“Witchcraft was a family affair, passing by instruction down from one generation to the next”

Pendle Hill, forever linked in the popular imagination to the tragedy of 1612

Fact or Fiction?

Although Thomas Potts' contemporary account of events, *The Wonderfull Discoverie*, is the main source of information on what took place in 1612, many of the 'facts' people know about the case of the witches of Pendle actually comes from two fictionalised yet highly influential versions of the story of Demdike, Chattox and their families: the mid-19th century novel *The Lancashire Witches* by William Harrison Ainsworth and Robert Neill's later *Mist Over Pendle*.

Some of the most popular and enduring inaccuracies spawned by these two works of fiction include the idea that Alice Nutter was the high-born Lady of Roughlee Hall, the belief that Pendle Hill was central to the events that took place, and, perhaps most sensationally, that Alizon Device was actually the secret love child of Alice Nutter. Despite these delicious details being demonstrably fictional inventions, this has not harmed the popularity of both novels, and both have been widely read by several generations. So enduringly popular is Ainsworth's work in fact, that it is the only one of his forty novels to have remained permanently in print to this day. Not only that, but many have come to discover the true story of the Pendle Witches through reading these works of fiction.

died. Likewise, after Demdike had quarrelled with Richard Baldwin, his daughter had died a year later. When Demdike was asked to aid John Nutter's cow, instead of curing it, the cow had died after Demdike worked her magic.

Poor, often reduced to begging, and low down on the social and economic scale, the power gained from such dark reputations was one of the few ways such women could exert some control over their own circumstances. It little mattered that their spells and charms were merely words taken from the old Catholic prayers and rituals that were now no longer permitted under a Protestant king: people believed them to be capable of wonderful and terrible things and they played that fact to their advantage. There were some things however, that witchcraft and reputation could not protect against.

In March 1612, Demdike's granddaughter, 18 year old Alizon Device, encountered John Law, a pedlar. She asked him for some pins but, as she was unable to pay for them, the man refused her the goods. Angered, Alizon muttered a curse against him before going on her way: unbeknownst to the girl, John Law fell to the ground, managing to get to a nearby inn before collapsing in a terrible state. The man's son was sent for, and Abraham Law listened grimly as his father, finally regaining the power of speech, told him that he had been bewitched and where he could find the young woman responsible.

The son wasted no time tracking Alizon down and taking her to the stricken pedlar's bedside: confronted with what she had done, the girl fell to her knees and begged forgiveness, admitting in this act, full culpability and the power of her curse. Matters could not end there; Abraham Law next spoke to local Justice, Roger Nowell. A man with a vested interest in both witch hunting and rooting out troublesome local elements such as Alizon's family, Nowell wasted no time in having the girl questioned.

Child testimony was not uncommon in English witch trials: children of the accused were used to bring about their parents' downfall

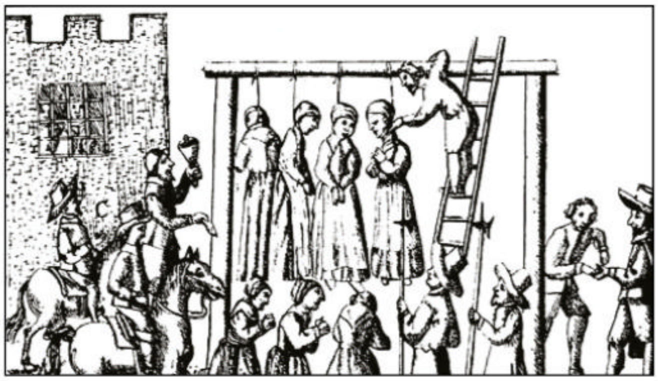
Whether terrified or put at her ease, the result was the same. Alizon spoke at length, answering in detail the questions put to her. According to Alizon, her grandmother was assuredly a witch. Not only that, but two years ago Demdike had persuaded her to share in her wicked ways and likewise turn to witchcraft. All she had to do was to let a devil

"The Pendle trial was the first in England to successfully 'prove' the existence of witches' sabbats"

Defining moment

Demdike succumbs 1598

After resisting temptation for several years, Demdike sends a spirit on her daughter's behalf to get revenge on Richard Baldwin after he fails to pay her. Around the same time, Demdike persuades her friend, Anne Whittle, alias Chattox, to likewise turn to a life of witchcraft. Chattox initially refuses, but finally permits Tibb, the same spirit that coerced Demdike to suck at a place by her right ribs. Thus two notorious witches were born: things soon sour however as the pair come into competition with each other in the local area for their newly acquired powers.



Timeline

1592

The witchcraft begins
Demdike meets a devil named Tibb while out begging. Despite being told she could have anything she liked in return for giving him her soul, she resists, telling him that she wants nothing. **1592**

Break in at the Device Household
Linens and some meal are stolen from the Device house. Later, Chattox's daughter Bessie is seem wearing a stolen garment. The Device women take back what is theirs.
1601

Device and Chattox make a deal
Wary of his Mother-in-law's rival, John Device agrees to pay an annual tribute to Chattox to the tune of eight pounds of meal in exchange for leaving his family alone.
1601

Death of John Device
After paying the tribute faithfully, one year John Device fails to make payment. He falls ill and dies, naming Chattox and her witchcraft as the cause as he dies.
Date unknown

Alizon Device meets a pedlar
Alizon meets John Law and begs some pins from him. When the request is refused she mutters angry words against the pedlar, only for him to suffer a stroke shortly afterwards.
18 March 1612

Alizon is accused
John Law blames Alizon for his condition: she is sent for and confesses, and the pedlar's son, Abraham Law, goes to local Justice Roger Nowell to complain against her.
21 - 29 March 1612

come to her and suck at a part of her body to seal the deal. In return, she would then have whatever she wanted. Alizon went on to reveal her belief in Demdike's part in the bewitching of John Nutter's cow, the death of Anne Nutter, and the turning of a pail of milk into butter through nefarious means.

Mother Chattox, Alizon continued, was as bad, or even worse than her grandmother; after the two families had quarrelled, her father, John Device, had been so afraid of the powers of old Chattox that he had agreed to pay a yearly tribute to the old woman in exchange for their safety. While the annual amount of meal had been given they had lived in relative peace, but the sense of security had been lamentably false: failing to pay one year, John Device had fallen ill and died, punishment, Alizon was sure, from Chattox for reneging on the arrangement. Chattox was also suspected of bewitching drink belonging to John Moore, and of bewitching one of his children to death. This was in revenge for a previous accusation from Moore against Chattox of bewitching his cattle. Alizon related how this had been done: Chattox had made a clay image of the child, drying and crumbling it in order to bring about the child's illness and eventual death. Finally, her own friend, Anne Nutter, had been bewitched to death after Chattox took offence at the girls laughing as she happened to enter the room. This was in revenge for a previous accusation from Moore against her of bewitching his cattle. It did not do to cross Mother Chattox.

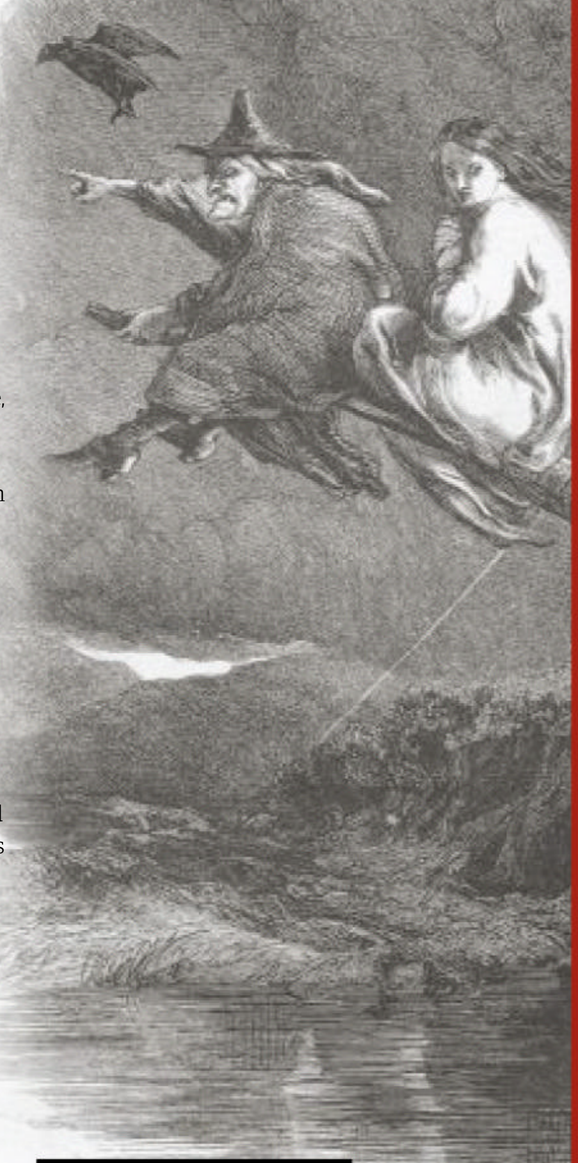
It is very likely that Alizon was asked leading questions in order to produce this wealth of damning information on her family and enemies. What promises or threats were given to her are unrecorded, but regardless, Alizon gave Nowell exactly what he expected or feared to hear.

That same day, Alizon's brother James was also questioned by Nowell, confirming that Demdike was indeed a witch and that he had not only heard terrible and frightening sounds that could have no earthly origin near his grandmother's house, but that he'd been visited in his bed by a black creature, the experience terrifying him. According to James, Alizon's encounter with the pedlar was not the first time she had been implicated in witchcraft: the previous year, she had been in trouble for bewitching the child of Henry Bullock.

On the strength of their words, a few days later the mother of Alizon and James, Elizabeth Device was questioned, and she not only incriminated herself but also Chattox and her daughter Anne Redferne. When Chattox was questioned the same day her words supported what others had already said, admitting to her role of witch and servant of the Devil. The result: Demdike, Chattox and her daughter Anne Redferne and Alizon were arrested and taken to Lancaster Castle.

The shock of the arrests hit hard, two families now missing their matriarchs. It so happened that a meeting of friends and family had already been planned before events overtook them, to take place on Good Friday at Demdike's home, Malkin Tower. One of the things apparently up for discussion was the naming of Alison's familiar spirit, something that could obviously now not occur as the unfortunate young woman was behind bars.

Despite later fictional invention, Pendle Hill did not actually play a role in the original account of Demdike and Chattox



The Pendle trial included many details imported from a continental view of witchcraft such as sabbats and covens, usually absent from English cases

Defining moment

Meeting at Malkin Tower, Good Friday, 1612

Friends and family of those arrested meet at the house of Demdike to discuss the situation and, it is said, make plans to attack Lancaster Castle with gunpowder, murder the gaoler, and rescue the prisoners. Among those in attendance are Jennet Preston, seeking revenge against Thomas Lister for having her tried as a witch, and reputedly high-born Alice Nutter. After feasting on a sheep stolen by James Device, they depart agreeing to meet a year later for a feast, but news of the meeting reaches Nowell and further arrests are made, bringing the number of prisoners up to 12.

Defining moment

Child in Court, 18 – 19 August 1612

9 year old Jennet Device is produced in court to speak against her grandmother, mother, siblings and neighbours. Primed by Nowell or his staff in advance, the girl performs with devastating effect, listing the travesties committed by her family and identifying those who had been present at Malkin Tower, effectively condemning them all. It is unclear just what she was told to make her do so and if the girl was aware of the consequences of her words until it was too late.

1612

Alizon Device is questioned
Roger Nowell takes Alizon in for questioning at his home, Read Hall. She incriminates herself, her grandmother, who she says convinced her to become a witch, and Old Chattox.
30 March 1612

Suspects are arrested
On the strength of Alison's testimony and that of her brother James, several arrests are made; Demdike, Chattox, her daughter Anne Redferne and Alizon herself are arrested and imprisoned in Lancaster Castle.
2 April 1612

Jennet Preston Executed
Tried at York, Jennet is found guilty of bewitching Thomas Lister senior to death and sentenced to hang: the sentence is carried out two days later.
27 - 29 July, 1612

Witches on Trial
The remaining suspects are tried at the Summer Lancaster Assizes and continue to further incriminate themselves and each other. Demdike does not make it to court, dying in prison before the trial starts.
18 August 1612

Sentence is passed
Of the remaining accused, ten are sentenced to hang for many counts of murder by witchcraft between them. Margaret Pearson escapes the noose, sentenced to imprisonment and four times in the pillory.
19 August 1612

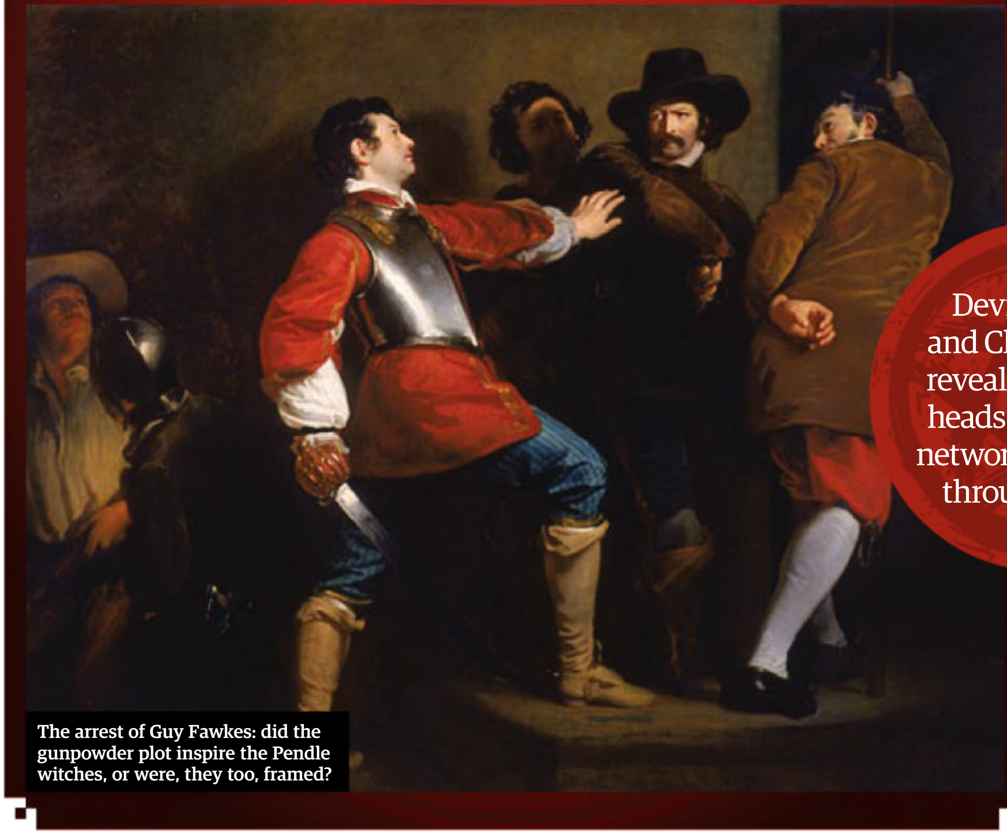
Pendle Witches executed
The condemned are executed and pass into history and the pages of our books as some of the most infamous witches in England's history. Thomas Potts later produces his lengthy account, *The Wonderfull Discoverie* justifying the outcome.
20 August 1612

Gunpowder, Treason and Plot

One of the accusations against the Pendle witches was the plot to blow up Lancaster Castle in order to rescue the imprisoned Alizon, Demdike, Chattox and her daughter. This revelation caused great alarm and held particular significance, coming as it did only a few years after Guy Fawkes' failed attempt against the King and Parliament. What, if any, truth did the accusation hold? James I and his councillors, along with those of the elite classes were acutely attuned to any hint of conspiracy, and extremist Catholics and witches were the dual threat of the era. Tarring the Pendle suspects with the brush of both might well have suited the needs of Judges Bromley and Altham, attempting to second-guess the wishes of their royal master. Potts' dedication of his account to Sir Thomas Knyvet, the very man who found Guy Fawkes in the cellars, likewise shows that social order, political stability and witchcraft, along with the need to justify what happened at Lancaster, were on the minds of all concerned.

After all, where would the accused have been able to find the gunpowder necessary in order to carry out their supposed plan? Those gathered at Malkin Tower may have spoken in the heat of the moment, their words then taken fatally out of context by young Jennet Device. Alternatively, the words might have been fed to the susceptible girl, only too willing to please, perhaps in exchange for her family's freedom.

There very likely was a plot: the question remains, against whom?


The arrest of Guy Fawkes: did the gunpowder plot inspire the Pendle witches, or were, they too, framed?

Lancaster Castle: Old Demdike died here before making it to trial, from illness or mistreatment

Now the meeting became, if later reports are to be believed, a chance to discuss an all important topic: how to free the suspects from prison. Later examination of those in attendance revealed that a deadly plan was hatched. The castle was to be blown up, serving the dual purpose of liberating the prisoners and killing the unpopular gaoler.

It was no time at all before Nowell learned of the ominous gathering. One might almost say it played right into his hands. Further questions were asked and on the strength of this news, further arrests were made, the meeting recast in the form of a witches' sabbat, until now, familiar only in tales of witchcraft from the Continent. Under such pressure, family and neighbourly connections imploded, incriminations and events were dragged up from years before as suspects confessed and accused each other in turn. Between them, the Device family and Chattox were revealed to be the heads of a terrible network of witches throughout the area, in possession of various spirits who did their bidding, wreaking havoc on those in the area who upset them. Jennet Preston from Gisburn had come to the gathering to seek help in murdering Thomas Lister in revenge for having her tried for witchcraft at the recent assizes. Alice Nutter had likewise been there, perhaps just paying a neighbourly call after hearing of the arrest of a friend, but now caught up in the accusations like the rest. Jane and John Bulcock, members of the dangerous group that preyed on the innocent were also named.

Four months passed with the suspected witches in Gaol, subjected to the far from sanitary conditions and deprivations of life in Lancaster Castle cells. It was too much for Demdike: she succumbed to illness and died before the Lancaster Summer Assizes, where the witches were to be tried.

The Device family and Chattox were revealed to be the heads of a terrible network of witches throughout the area

The trial opened 18 August under Judge Sir Edward Bromley. The accused were brought into the packed and crowded court room in turn: with the place too noisy to hear properly what was being asked, disoriented and drained from lack of sleep and the deprivations of prison and with no defence allowed, the odds were stacked against them from the outset. With her mother now safe from censure, Elizabeth Device was cast in the role of the worst witch of them all, her foul deeds and behaviour revealed for all to hear. If the account is to be believed, the group fit perfectly the stereotypical image of witches. Old blind Chattox, Elizabeth Device with one eye looking in one direction while the other eye looked in another, and James Device, weak of spirit and body, barely able to stand or speak clearly when he was called to do so: they were witches, it was clear, inside and out.

Tales of demonic pacts, image magic, sabbats and spells kept the crowd agog, each fresh evidence further proving that the accused were guilty of not only witchcraft but religious and social unrest. To further ensure the desired outcome the prosecution had an ace up their sleeve in the form of nine-year-old Jennet Device. If Alizon had begun the spiral of condemnation against them all, it was young Jennet who sealed their fate. Being too short to see or be seen, the girl was stood on a table for maximum effect, speaking out against her family and neighbours as she identified those who had been at Malkin Tower and related their purpose for being so. As the girl was produced Elizabeth Device broke down, yelling at her daughter as she realised

500 years on, Pendle Hill marked the anniversary of the trials

the terrible outcome that her words would have. The girl was, it was said, confused and upset by the outburst – taken as further proof of the terrible nature of Elizabeth Device – when her mother was removed she continued in her testimony.

By the end of the day, Chattox, Elizabeth Device and James Device were found guilty on various counts of murder by witchcraft. Anne Redferne fared better: the daughter of Chattox was acquitted of the charge of murdering Robert Nutter. The following day brought more guilty verdicts: Alizon Device, Alice Nutter, John and Jane Bulcock, Katherine Hewitt, and Isobel Robey, were all found guilty and condemned to death. Anne Redferne's luck also ran out. Despite the previous day's escape, she was tried on the charge of murdering Christopher Nutter and the charge stuck. Anne was found guilty and sentenced to hang with the rest.

Jennet Preston had been returned to her native Yorkshire where she was once more tried for murder by witchcraft, this time of Thomas Lister senior. Jennet was found guilty and executed 29 July.

The executions of the others took place on 20 August, and thus were created the most notorious witches in English history.

> Some believe James Device was tortured into confession, despite torture of suspects being illegal under English law

The injustice of the Pendle trial is embodied in this memorial to Alice Nutter, an enduring reminder of the events of 1612

© Corbis; Alamy

The Ghoul Next Door

Revered and feared in villages across Europe, cunning folk and their magic were part of everyday life until a new move against witches led many to their deaths

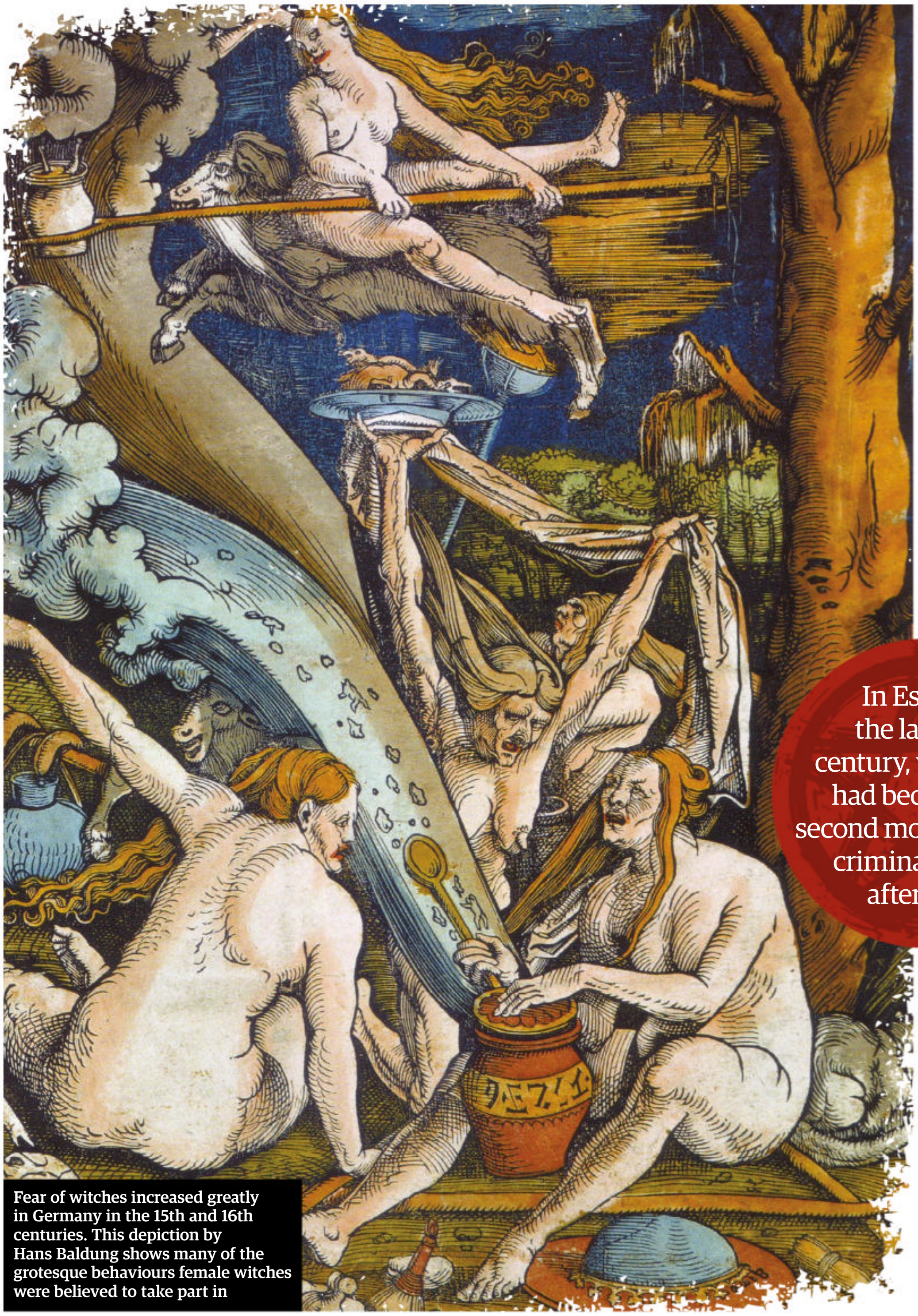
When Issobell Sinclair admitted she had talked to fairies as she tried to protect cattle from harm on Hallowe'en with a sheet and some hair, she sealed her fate. The Scottish woman was hanged as a witch soon after her trial in 1633. But just a century earlier she might have gone unharmed, even unnoticed. For Issobell was following a path that thousands of men and women had taken for centuries. White witches, also called cunning or wise folk, had been an integral part of many God fearing communities since Roman times. They made cures, gave advice and offered protection to people and their livelihoods. But as organised religion changed and fear of witchcraft spread in the 16th and 17th centuries, the thin line between their practices and the darker arts of black witchcraft blurred, and soon the places they had once called home were no place for the ghoul next door.

Potions made of urine and hair were made for protection against witches, who would suffer pain if the bottle was buried or burned

Magic was so widely practised in Tudor England that leading cleric, Bishop Hugh Latimer, warned openly in 1552 that "a great many of us when we be in trouble, or sickness, or lose anything, we run hither and thither to witches, or sorcerers, whom we call wise men...". Just about everyone knew where to find a witch or cunning person to help them with their problems. It was no different across Europe. The wise folk were a fixture in their communities, inspiring both respect and fear. And in an age when science could offer little explanation for anything, their wisdom held power.

The position was open to anyone although some people were believed to be born with special powers. Seventh sons of seventh sons were said to be able to cure goitre and scrofula. There was also a belief that special powers could be inherited or passed on from one cunning person to their chosen successor. But anyone who wanted to learn magic and was willing to try it could acquire a reputation as one of the cunning folk. The range of people practising magic can be seen in the convictions secured in Rouen in France in 1605 when shepherds, apothecaries and labourers were all found guilty of being witches. The cunning folk came from all walks of life and often lived in the very heart of their communities.

Whether their spells worked wasn't really the issue. Once someone was known as a wise man or woman, they would find themselves consulted on a regular basis. Often they did it for prestige rather than to get rich. Many cunning folk earned very little from their magic and many kept prices low to make sure they undercut business rivals. Even when they used their powers for good, cunning folk attracted suspicion and stuck to minimal charges to avoid being accused of fraud or trying to con vulnerable people out of cash. Some refused to take money at all. Ann Jefferies, a teenage servant



Fear of witches increased greatly in Germany in the 15th and 16th centuries. This depiction by Hans Baldung shows many of the grotesque behaviours female witches were believed to take part in

in Cornwall, fell seriously ill in 1645 and on her recovery said she had been visited by fairies during her sickness. She soon gained a reputation for being able to cure by touch but despite becoming something of a local celebrity, she always refused payment for her services.

It's no surprise her skills were in such demand. Cunning folk were often consulted for cures for both people and animals. They used spells and charms which held their own against the less-than-sophisticated medicine of the day in terms of popularity. Common practices included mumbling words over the patient or placing scribbled messages on them. Often these derived from old Latin phrases which the witch's mostly illiterate clients couldn't read. Some of the charms contained a form of prayer – Jane Howe from Somerset wrote down some of the methods she knew including one said to stop bleeding which ended by calling for a divine blessing. Curing by touch was popular across Europe as was the use of herbs and plants. Here the white witch's practices were close to traditional medicine which also relied on botanics to cure, but the cunning folk always ascribed their success to magic. And they were always at pains to point out that they had to be involved in the treatment if it was to stand any chance of success.

"What a witch said held sway, and much of their influence came from fear"

Witches were also asked for help in resolving crime, including the return of stolen goods. Sometimes they were reported to do this by showing their clients the image of the criminal in a glass or mirror or by using a crystal ball to identify them. Often, the very knowledge that the local cunning man or woman had been consulted was enough in itself to spur the thief into handing back what had been taken, for their powers, even when used for good, inspired fear. Usually, a condition of helping was that the wrongdoer escaped any punishment. What a white witch said held sway, and much of their influence in the local community came from fear. After all, they were known for their powers which many believed could cure illness and tell the future. No one wanted to be on the receiving end of those skills if they were turned on them in revenge.

In Essex in the late 16th century, witchcraft had become the second most common criminal charge after theft

Love magic was also popular, with white witches consulted to help bring about a marriage or reinvigorate a relationship that had gone off the boil. Wise women were widely consulted on pregnancy and childbirth, attending deliveries and staying with mothers afterwards. White witches were also believed to be able to detect other witches whose intentions were harmful. Illness at the time could be seen as a sign of being bewitched and as well as asking for a cure, the client of the cunning folk might also want to discover who was doing them harm. The white witch rarely named a suspect. Instead, they would offer instructions on rituals which they said would draw the perpetrator to the victim's house, or they would tell them that the person they met at a particular time was the guilty party. But in the late 16th and early 17th centuries, it was the white witch who was increasingly at risk of capture.

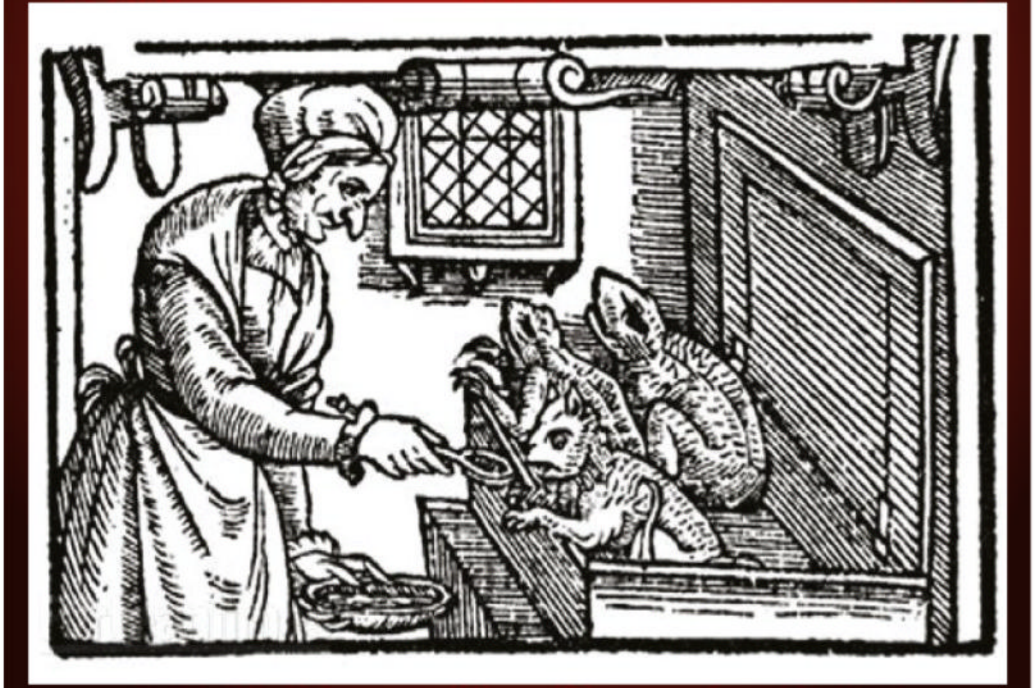
Attitudes to all forms of magic had been changing rapidly since the 1400s. The early Christian Church called both magic and witchcraft

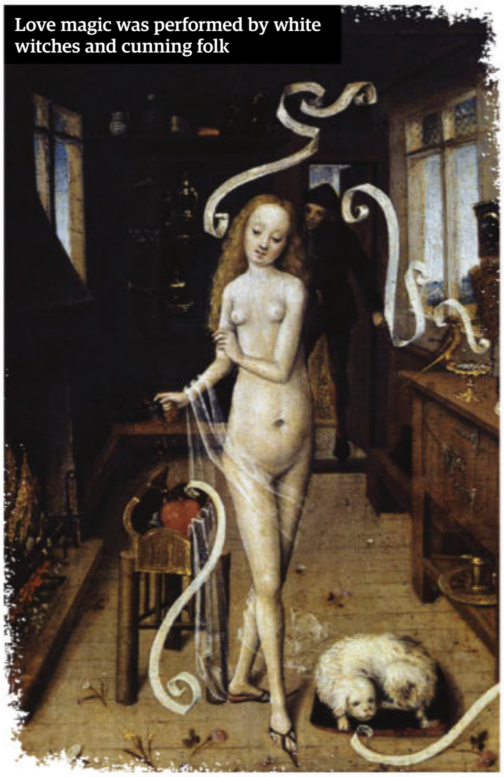
Why Witches Were Usually Women

Usually old, sometimes ugly, often female. The witch of children's fairytales still lingers as a stereotype today. Court records show that across Europe the majority of those tried as witches were women even though white witches and cunning folk were just as likely to be men. However, as the Church became more intent on stamping out all forms of heresy, women became the main focus of witch hunts.

From the 15th century onwards women were seen as increasingly vulnerable to the temptations of magic. They were viewed as sex mad and seriously stupid by many, and clerics writing on demonology described lust-filled women who were seduced into evil by the Devil and took part in unholy orgies.

Later reformers took an equally dim view. For Martin Luther, women were so weak that they were easily won over by the promises of magic. In the 16th and 17th centuries, witches were nearly always women and any men caught in the act were usually seen to have been tempted over to darkness by a wicked woman. But when the wave of persecutions ended and witchcraft was no longer pursued through the courts, the wise folk recorded in local communities once more featured men as well as women.





Love magic was performed by white witches and cunning folk

delusions. But during the Middle Ages, clerics turned their attention to witchcraft again. The German churchman, Heinrich Kramer, saw witches as a real threat to society and to the souls of his congregation. His *Malleus Maleficarum*, published in 1487, insisted that witchcraft was real and a heresy. It would influence attitudes for three hundred years. Kramer wanted witches hunted down, tortured if need be to extract confessions and put to death. Black witches, who used magic to harm others, were liable to arrest already. But now the idea began to take hold that all witches were wrong. Their powers came under suspicion and they were increasingly seen as agents of the Devil, in league with demons and taking part in dreadful rituals.

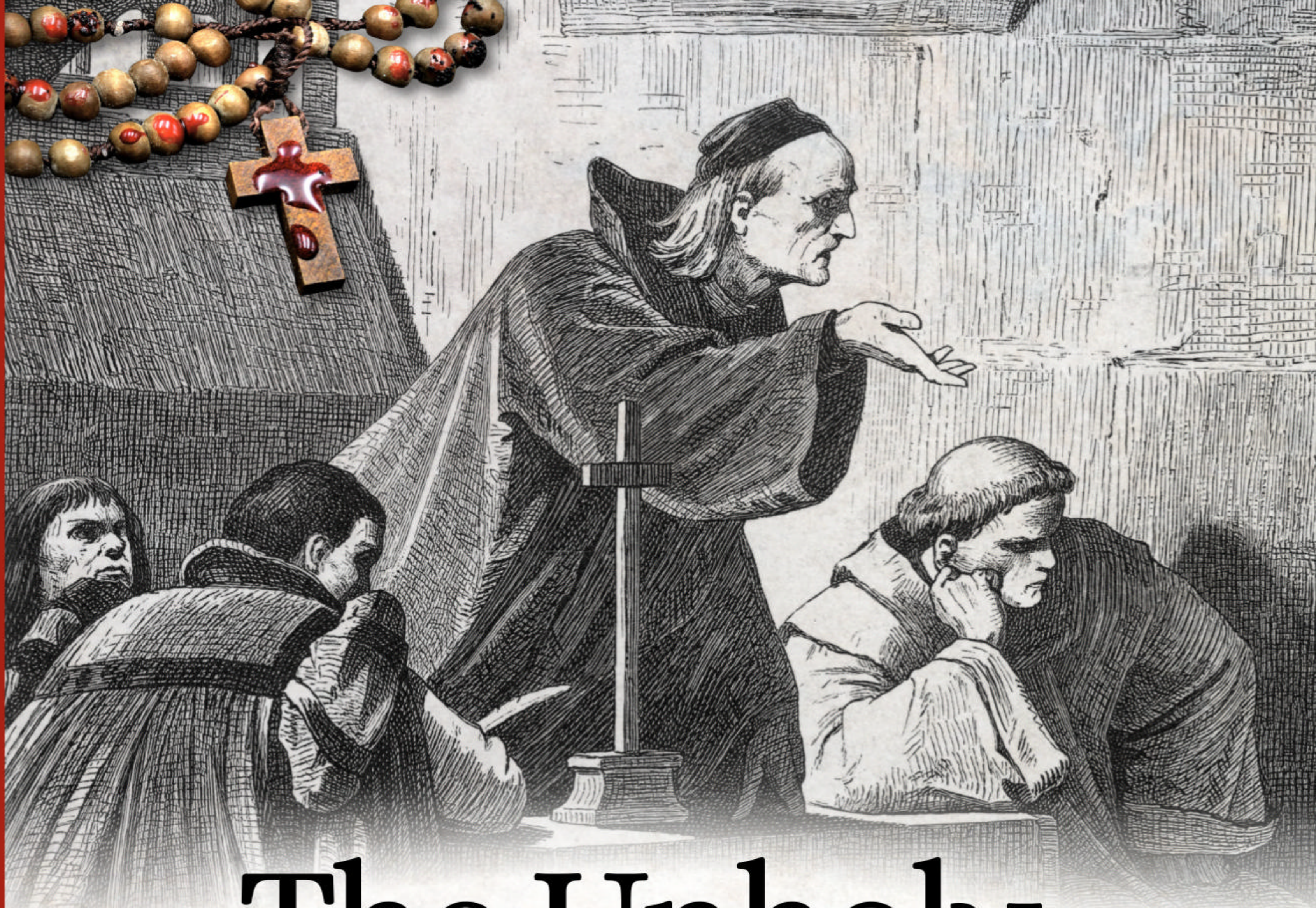
White witches or cunning folk were called many other names, including wizard, blessing witch, enchanter and charmer

"Witches were seen as agents of the Devil, in league with demons"

Within decades, clerics in southern Germany had started often large-scale witch hunts which then spread to other countries. In Trier, a series of persecutions under Archbishop Johann VII von Schonenberg at the end of the century left two villages with just two residents – the rest had been executed as witches. In Lorraine, the judge Nicholas Remy claimed he had sentenced 900 witches to death in just ten years. Court records show that many of those accused were originally suspected because they carried out what had previously been thought of as everyday magic. Under duress or through fear, many confessed to darker forms of witchcraft. Sometimes, those who admitted to being a witch went on to point the finger at others. In 1582, Ursula Kemp was arrested in St Osyth in Essex and admitted using witchcraft to kill a child and her own sister in law. She then accused others of being witches – several went on to confess to gruesome crimes after their arrests.

Hysteria around witchcraft began to build across Europe. Jobs that had been the preserve of the wise woman, like midwifery, became a target for persecutions especially as beliefs grew that witches used fat from children to make flying ointments. In 1669, a 67-year-old lying-in maid called Anna Ebeler was hanged in Augsburg in Germany after being accused of killing a new mother with a bowl of soup. In England, witchfinders began to appear. These self-appointed justices would visit different towns and, for a set fee, root out supposed witches who were then handed over to the courts.

The witch hunts across Europe in the 16th and 17th century are believed to have led to at least 40,000 documented executions. Many more are thought to have died while in prison awaiting trial or to have taken their own lives through fear. By the 18th century, witchcraft began to fade from criminal records, but the Enlightenment also meant that many of the old practices that had got white witches into so much trouble had lost their sway with people. Old wives' tales and folklore still exist, but they are just echoes of a time when they gave real power to the ghoul next door.



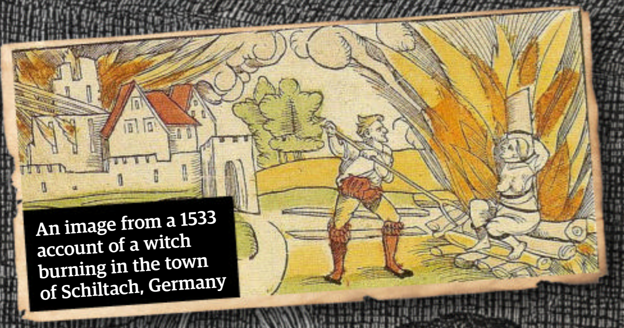
The Unholy Roman Empire

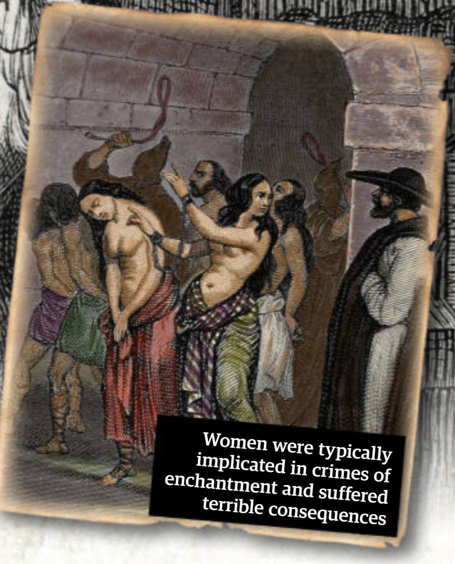
How a unique cocktail of religious turmoil, bitter conflict, and abuse of power turned the German states into Europe's witch hunting heartland

The Renaissance is seen as a time where artistry and scientific thought flourished in Europe. Some of the world's greatest artists, scientists and thinkers such as Michelangelo, Isaac Newton and René Descartes appear and work to advance human ingenuity. But through this, progress is layered in suspicion and quack science, like alchemy, was pursued with great vigour. It seems strange then that this period of enlightenment in European history would see the rise of a large number of witch hunts, with many of them being carried out in the Holy Roman Empire. A deadly cocktail of war, famine, religious and social upheaval was the perfect breeding ground for mistrust and hysteria. This panic was aimed at the supernatural as a way of trying to cope with the calamities that had befallen communities. A scapegoat was needed and witchcraft, ungodly and in league with the devil, ticked all the boxes.

In this epidemic, running from roughly the 1480s to 1680s, tens of thousands of people, most of them old women, were executed. These people were accused of being magic users, of flying to nocturnal coven meetings on the backs of demons, got up to all sorts of mischief and were believed to be a major threat to both the Christian Church and the government. In the Holy Roman Empire at the time, church and state were almost indistinguishable with many principalities ruled by prince-bishops, members of the church who also held high political office; a leftover method of government from the Roman Empire. So how did Europe, a continent that was going through a revitalisation of art, science and critical thinking suddenly engage in a orgy of violence, killing and rampant hysteria?

It all began with a change in the fundamental social and economic makeup of the European landscape. By the 15th century, the village community, the typical of European life for hundreds of years, was changing. Where there had previously been close-knit communities all working towards survival, now existed communities with developing social strata as some members began to acquire great wealth. With the land being parcelled up, many


An image from a 1533 account of a witch burning in the town of Schiltach, Germany


Women were typically implicated in crimes of enchantment and suffered terrible consequences

“The religious and economic climate set the tone of the witch trials”

peasants were forced to relocate to larger cities and towns, bringing with them their rural sensibilities and beliefs. Poverty was also another factor in the rise of witch hysteria with beggars, always a marginalised section of society, being especially targeted as they were undesirable to the more wealthy way of life. Stigma in the 16th century was aimed at the very poor and very old. This meant that many of the victims of these witch hunts were elderly women. Even today the stereotypical image or idea of a witch is a hunched old woman.

Persecution of certain groups like witches, Jews and lepers were a way for the prince-bishops to exercise power. The unholy alliance between religion and government gave them both spiritual and legal status to bend the peasantry to their will. The executions served a dual purpose of showing a ruler's power, by having the accused publicly admit their fault to the community and with this admission be welcomed back into the fold – a fine sentiment when the accused isn't dead by the end.

The Protestant Reformation, a landmark event in European history, was one of the largest contributing factors that added fuel to the witch hunt bonfire. Many people who were secure in their knowledge of God, His plan for humanity and the afterlife had their beliefs shattered overnight. Where there had once been one major church doctrine, there now existed dozens of interpretations of God's word. Imagine the fear and anxiety that people must have felt to suddenly have a community split down the middle with everyone holding a different opinion.

The aims of alchemy include the transmutation of base metals into gold and finding a cure for all diseases

The new religious schism also led to one of the worst conflicts in European history and one that ravaged large portions of the Holy Roman Empire, the Thirty Years' War. All the fear and anger at these changes and devastation needed to be channelled and witches, especially women, became the perfect scapegoat. With years of warfare ravaging the continent, the male population, who were serving in the armies, declined significantly. This led to a major discrepancy in the number of elderly women compared to elderly men. The women would live on the fringes of a community and would be targeted for their suspicious professions. Being a midwife or practicing herbal medicine could teach knowledge that could be construed as dark magic to the uninitiated.

The economic and religious climate set the tone of the witch trials but were absent from the charges levelled against them. Witches were thought to do the bidding of Satan and this fear spawned one of the witch hunter manual, The *Malleus Maleficarum*. This tome was used all throughout the Holy Roman Empire by witch hunters to help them identify and punish practitioners of the black arts. The church had acknowledged black magic and witchcraft as a clean and present danger to the Christian way of life and the rulers of the Holy Roman Empire used the mass hysteria in order to gain power and crush their opponents.

A CATALOGUE OF CHAOS

Paranoia and persecution flared up in almost every corner of the Holy Roman Empire

Bamberg witch trials

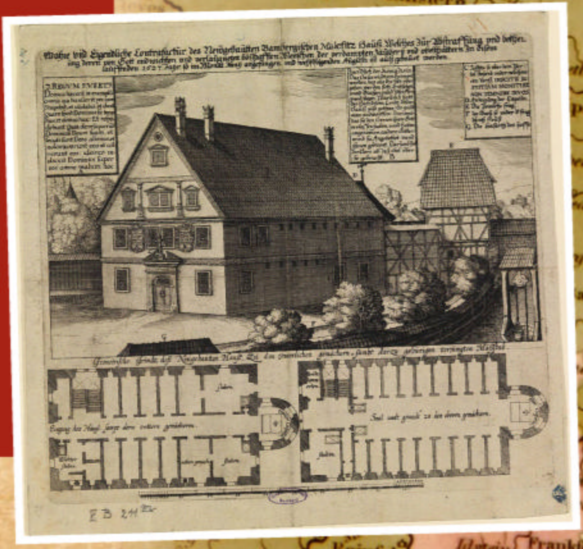
Bamberg (1609-1631)

Accused
Over 1000
Convictions
900
Executions
c.900

The witch trials in Bamberg were pursued with vigour by the cities leaders. Under Prince-Bishop Johann Gottfried von Aschhausen, who held office from 1609 to 1622, the trials in earnest as his predecessors had focused more on fighting protestants than witches. Crop failures had added to public hysteria and after decrees were issued against diviners and sorcerers, the hunts grew in size from six victims to around 300. When Johann Georg Fuchs von Dornheim, known as the witch burner or witch-bishop, became prince-bishop in 1623 the trials went into overdrive as a result of repeated crop failure. A ruthless witch hunter, von Dornheim ordered the building of the Drudenhaus, a prison built solely to house and torture witches.

The accused came from all walks of life with their social status varying greatly. Some were members of rival ruling families, while tradesmen like butchers, bakers and brewers were also accused. The poisoning of supplies by magical means was very much alive in the public imagination, so these trades were suspect. As usual the lower classes were targeted with menial jobs like labourers, fishermen and servants being accused of sabbat-attenders. Victims would have their property confiscated and the rulers grew rich off of the proceedings. The general population began to realise that anyone could be accused and the lust for persecution waned as self interest took over.

The ordeal was finally stopped when Swedish troops moved into the area and closed the prison, although the prisoners had to swear to keep their mouths shut about the ordeals they went through.



Lemgo

Lippe (1628-1637)

Accused
110
Convictions
84
Executions
84

Würzburg witch trials

Würzburg (1626-1631)

Accused
c.1000
Convictions
c.900
Executions
c.900

Part of the witch craze that gripped the empire at the beginning of the 17th century, the Würzburg trials were some of the bloodiest. As with many of the witch hunts in the Holy Roman Empire, the trials at Würzburg were carried out on the orders of the prince-bishop with Philipp Adolf von Ehrenberg taking a special interest. His gruesome tally included his own nephew, 19 catholic priests and children as young as seven. This trial truly went after every rung of society and not just the poorest. The Chancellor of the Prince-Bishop of Würzburg penned a letter to a friend detailing some of the more horrifying cases, 'To conclude this wretched matter, there are children of three and four years, to the number of three hundred, who are said to have had intercourse with the Devil. I have seen put to death children of seven, promising students of ten, twelve, fourteen, and fifteen'.

While there were many burnings, the victims were usually beheaded first, sparing them the agony of the flames. The killing ended when the war reached Würzburg and the Swedes under Gustavus Adolphus stopped the trials.

Baden

Baden (1627-1632)

Accused
244
Convictions
231
Executions
231

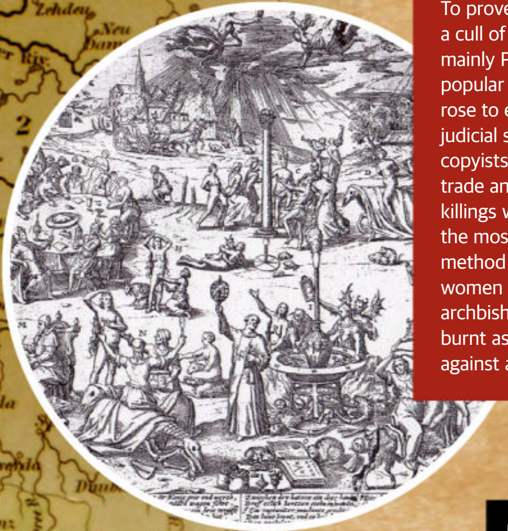
Trier witch trials

Trier (1581-1593)

Accused
c.800
Convictions
c.600
Executions
c.368-1000

The witch trials at Trier didn't reach the city until 1587 as many of the hunts were carried out in rural locations around the town. It is noteworthy not just for being one of the largest hunts in Germany but for the toll it took on the local female population. At least two villages in the surrounding area were left with only one female occupant after the funeral pyres had died down.

The driving force behind the trials was the Archbishop-Elector Johann von Schönenberg, a fanatical follower of the Jesuits. To prove his loyalty and devotion to the order he orchestrated a cull of groups that he thought were detrimental to society, mainly Protestants, Jews and witches. They were initially very popular with a contemporary remarking 'the whole country rose to exterminate the witches'. As people fell foul of the harsh judicial system the ruling elite and associated trades (notaries, copyists and tavern keepers etc) grew rich off the boom in trade and confiscated goods. There was opposition to the killings with the rector of the university, Dietrich Flade, being the most prominent. Doubting that torture was an effective method of extracting a confession Dietrich treated the men and women accused with compassion. This did not sit well with the archbishop who had this rival tortured, strangled and finally burnt as a witch, a chilling message to any who should speak out against authority.



Thuringia witch trials

Thuringia (1590-1604)

Accused
c.1500
Convictions
c.500
Executions
500

Fulda witch trials

Fulda (1603-1606)

Accused
c.250
Convictions
c.250
Executions
c.250

Although the witch trials in Fulda only lasted for three years, they were no less brutal than any other. In 1602 Balthasar von Dernbach had just ascended to be Prince-abbot after 20 years in exile. A strict catholic who had been subjected to a very stern religious upbringing, Balthasar had been banished for relentlessly pursuing Protestants in the Counter-Reformation. He continued this purge with his return to power and had set about investigating witchcraft and sorcery by 1603 to fully bring the city back into the folds of Catholicism.

The most famous case to come out of Fulda was the trial of Merga Bien. Twice widowed and now pregnant by her third husband, she was picked up in the first wave of witches arrests in the city. Her family protested the arrest but under torture she was forced to confess that her child was conceived by the Devil, an argument upheld as she had conceived no children with her current husband for 14 years. She was also made to admit to the murder of her second husband with the implication that as she was heiress to his estate, she would reap the rewards from his demise. Despite her family's declarations of innocence, both she and her unborn baby were burned alive at the stake. The trials came to a swift close after the death of Balthasar in 1606, the public's appetite for death clear sated.

Swabian witch trials

Swabia (1492-1711)

Accused
c.600
Convictions
528
Executions
406

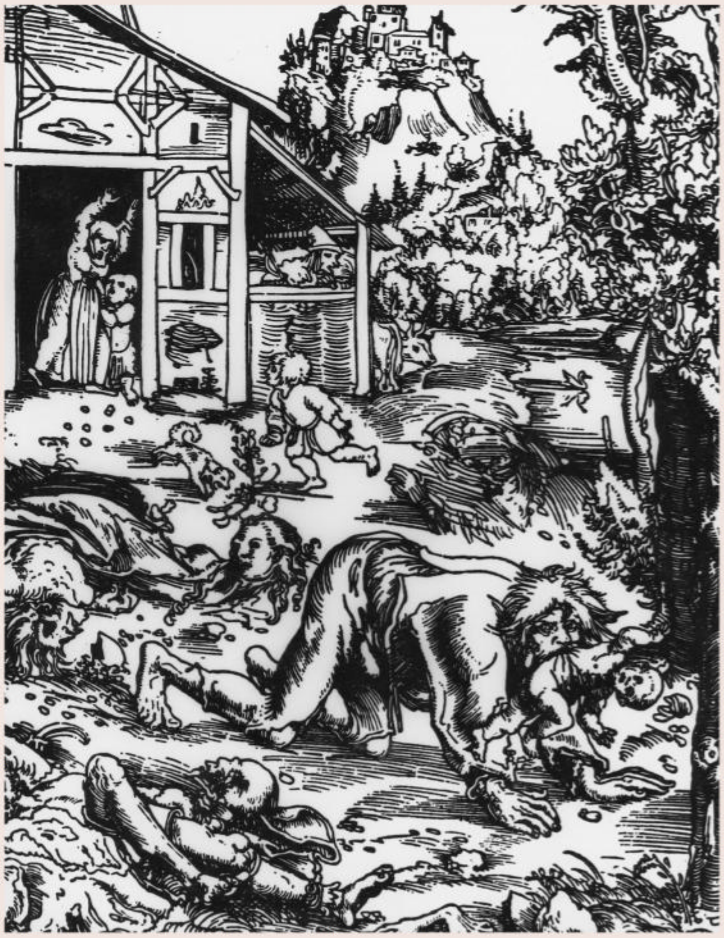
Howl at the Moon

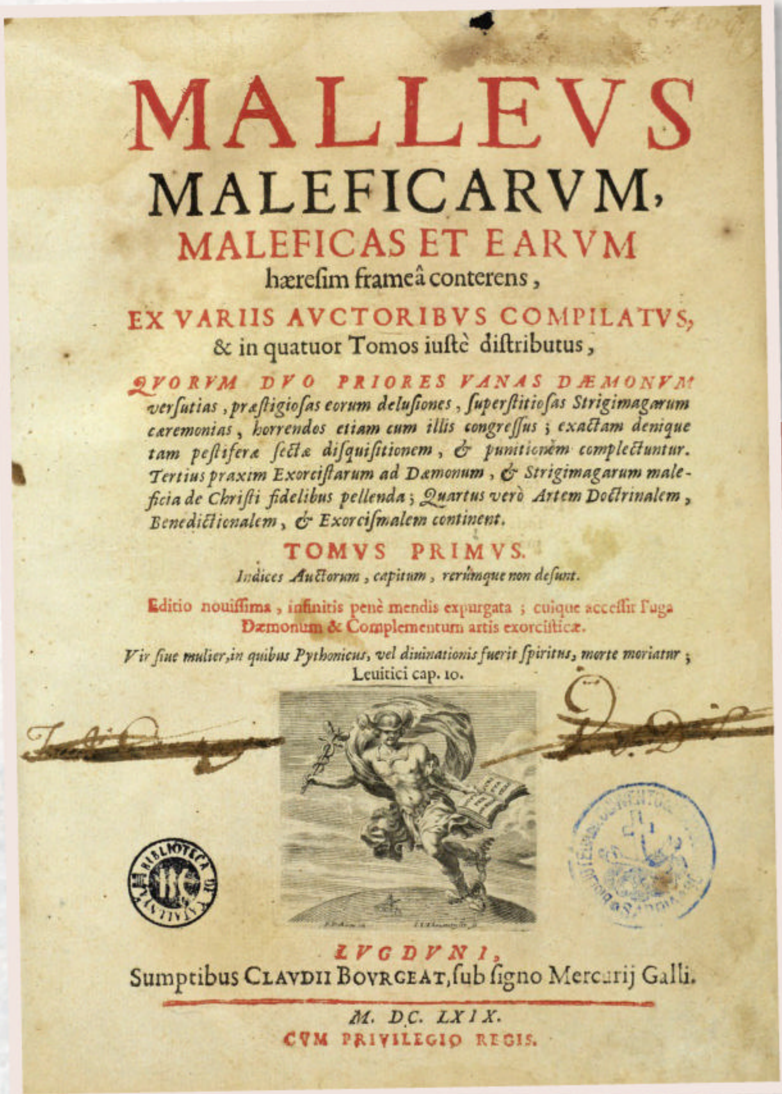
Witches weren't the only worry to the German population

If witches weren't enough for German farmers to be afraid of there were also whispers of werewolves roaming the land. Lycanthropy, like witchcraft, had become an increasingly popular accusation in Europe since the 15th century, with the first recorded case appearing in France 1521. The witch and wolf went hand in hand with rumours that magic users could transform themselves into wolves in order to feast on their victims. These trials were rather thin on the ground compared to witch trials but follow the same pattern of fear and paranoia that also drove the former.

The most famous cases in the Holy Roman Empire was the Werewolf of Bedburg, identified as the hapless Peter Stumpp. Peter was a widowed wealthy farmer who was thought highly of in the village, that is until cattle started dying and children were disappearing. Under torture Peter confessed to shapeshifting and murdering children and pregnant women. His powers came from a belt the Devil had given him when he was 12 and transformed him into "the likeness of a…devouring wolf…with eyes…which in the night sparkled like fire…most sharp and cruel teeth…and mighty paws."

His suspect crimes notwithstanding his execution is one of the most graphic we have from the period. Strapped to a wheel his flesh was torn by red hot pincers and his bones broken with a blunt axe head. Only after this was he beheaded.





MALLEVS
MALEFICARVM,
MALEFICAS ET EARVM
hæreſim frameâ conterens,
EX VARIIS AVCTORIBVS COMPILATVS,
& in quatuor Tomos iuſtè diſtributus,

QVORVM DVO PRIORES VANAS DÆMONVM verſutias, præſtigioſas eorum deluſiones, ſuperſtitioſas Strigimagarum cæremonias, horrendos etiam cum illis congreſſus; exactam denique tam peſtiferæ ſectæ diſquiſitionem, & punitionem complectuntur. Tertius praxim Exorciſtarum ad Dæmonum, & Strigimagarum maleficia de Chriſti fidelibus pellenda; Quartus verò Artem Doctrinalem, Benedictionalem, & Exorciſmalem continent.

TOMVS PRIMVS.
Indices Auctorum, capitum, rerúmque non deſunt.

Editio nouiſſima, infinitis penè mendis expurgata; cuique acceſſit Fuga Dæmonum & Complementum artis exorciſticæ.

Vir ſiue mulier, in quibus Pythonicus, vel diuinationis fuerit ſpiritus, morte moriatur;
Leuitici cap. 10.

LVGDVNI,
Sumptibus CLAVDII BOVRGEAT, ſub ſigno Mercurij Galli.
M. DC. LXIX.
CVM PRIVILEGIO REGIS.

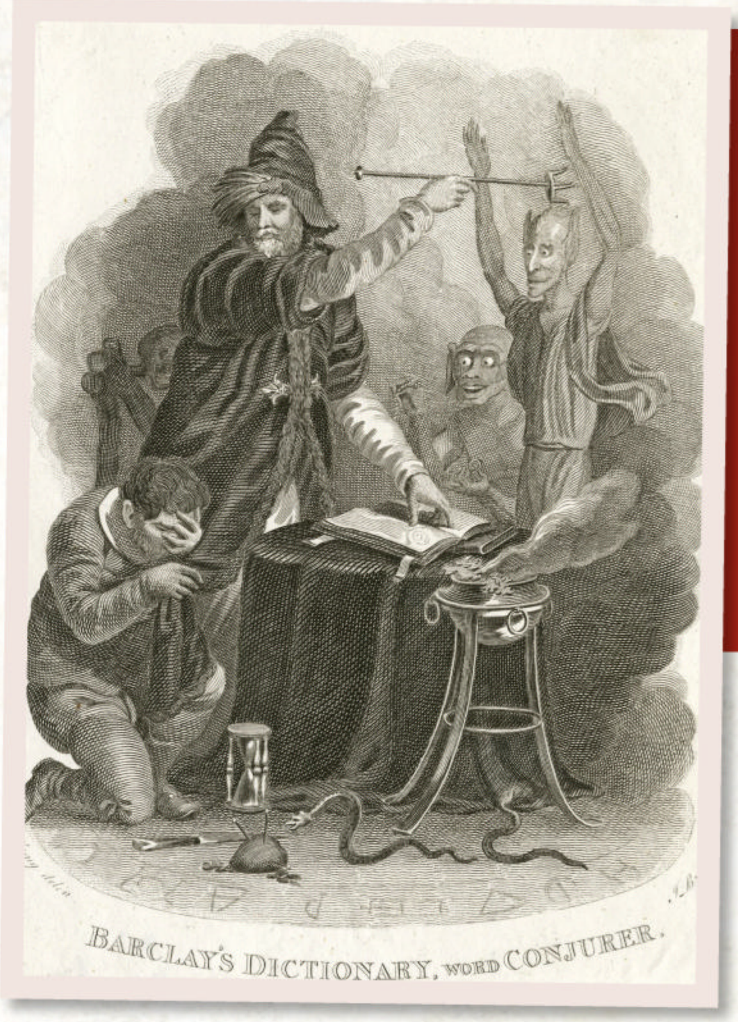
> "Not many people would be willing to admit dealing in the dark arts"

Hexenhammer

The Malleus Maleficarum was a tomb intended to identify and end the witch menace

Witchcraft was acknowledged by Pope Innocent VIII in his 1484 Papal Bull *Summis Desiderantes* and would pave the way for creation of the most famous text on witch hunting – the *Malleus Maleficarum*, which translates to the *Hammer of Witches*. The mountains between Italy and Germany housed communities that had long been sheltered and two members of the Church were dispatched to investigate rumours of agrarian cults being worshipped in secret. These two men were Jakob Sprenger and Heinrich Kramer and on their return penned the work.

The text is split into three parts. First it explains how to identify a witch, then how to deal with said witch in legal terms and finally how to protect yourself from witchcraft. It can be seen as psychoanalytical study of the late medieval period's hatred towards women and while most of the content on witches had been around for years, it certainly helped bring witchcraft to the public. The threat of male impotence is one of the driving factors of the text, possibly highlighting male fears and perhaps explaining the zeal that followed these horrific trials and executions.


BARCLAY'S DICTIONARY, WORD CONJURER.

I'm a Witch and So's My Wife

Not all witches were female

While the majority of witches tried and executed were female, men could also find themselves at the mercy of witch hunters. Just under 25 per cent of those accused were men. A stereotypical Holy Roman male who was unlucky enough to be accused of witchcraft had a much better chance of escaping execution than their female counterparts however. 74 per cent of women accused were killed in contrast to only 64 per cent of men meeting the same fate and also enjoyed much better treatment while being held captive. The *Malleus Maleficarum*, the most common tool in a witch hunters arsenal, is an incredibly misogynistic text that lays the blame of witchcraft directly at the female sex's door.

While they enjoyed better treatment the trials could be as vicious as ever and some, like the Sorcerer Jack, or Zaubererjackl trials, were composed many of male victims. From 1678-1680, 150 people, most of them young beggar boys were executed for being followers of 'Sorcerer Jack', or Jacob Koller. This elusive figure was never captured and gained mythical status, apparently teaching young beggars to use sorcery against those who didn't support the act of begging. So popular was the myth that Jack was still invoked in trials well into the 18th century.

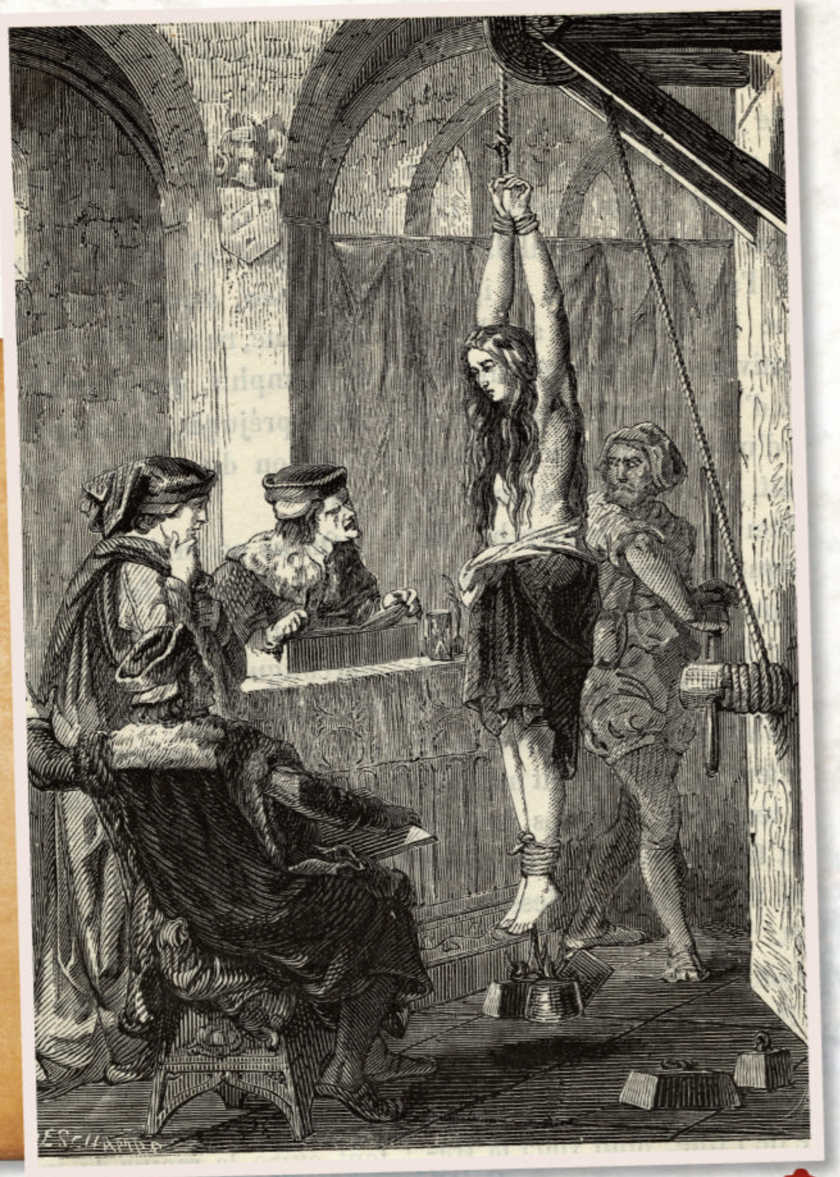
Tools of Confession

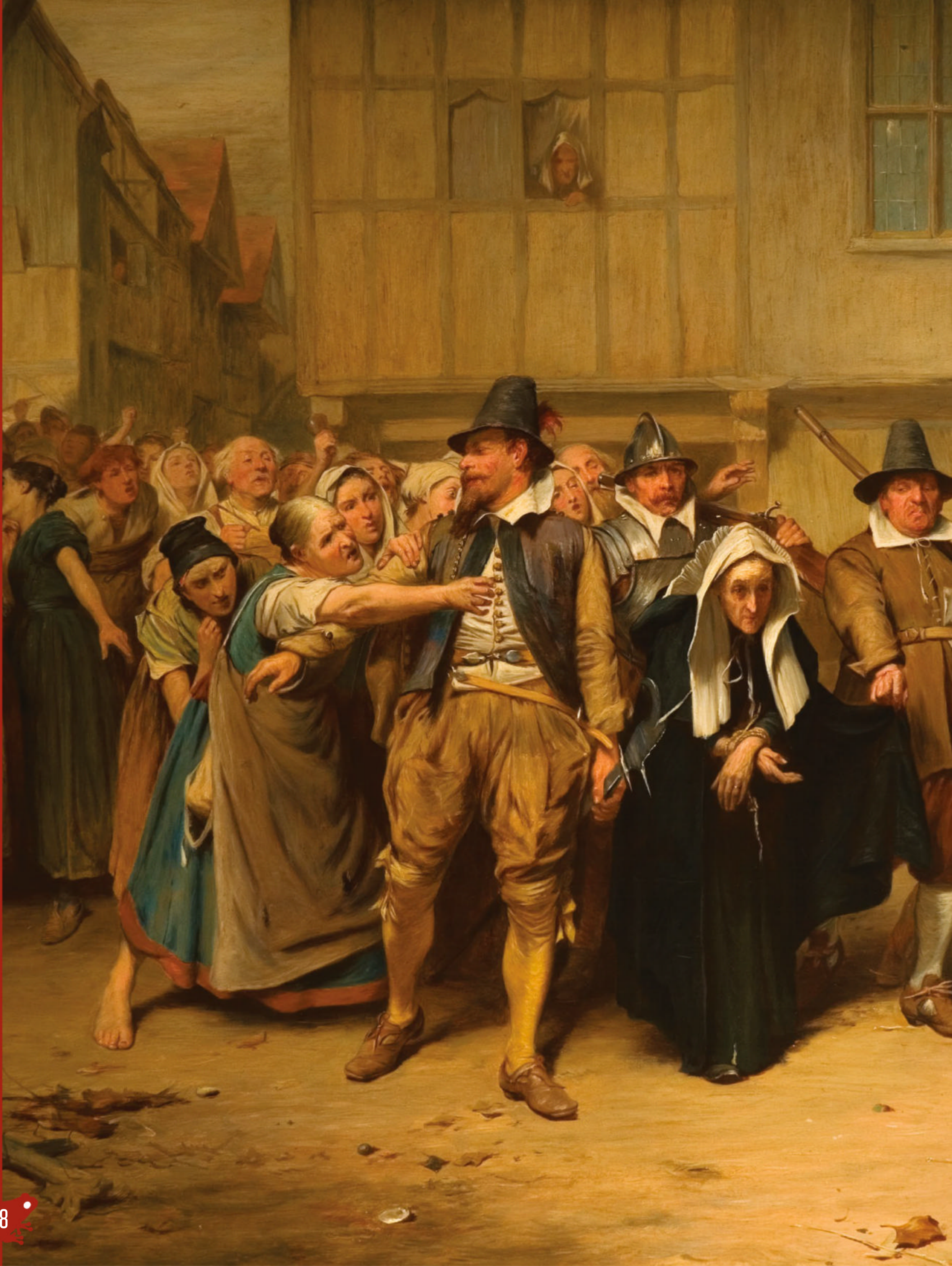
Interrogators used many horrible methods to get the answers they wanted

The easiest way to extract a confession out of an accused witch was through torture. Not many people would be willing to admit to dealing in the dark arts knowing what the consequences would be. A confession would be asked for and if it was not forthcoming, then torture would be threatened and finally carried out if the party was still attesting their innocence. As you would expect, the methods used were horrific and caused debilitating injuries. These were often simple in nature but excruciating in practice. A simple vice, sometimes with sharp metal points added, were used to crush victim's thumbs or toes. Strappado, or corda, was a common technique where the accused would be suspended by their wrists, with arms tied behind their backs, for extended periods of time.

Once the torture had produced the confession an execution would usually follow. While the stereotypical image of a witch execution is being burned at the stake beheading and strangulation were also widely used. 'Lucky' victims would be shown mercy by being strangled or beheaded before being burned, absolving them in the eyes of god and the community.

While these methods were effective in getting the answers the witch hunters wanted the confessions made under duress were often lies. Johannes Junius, an unfortunate victim of the Bamberg trials, smuggled a letter out to his daughter before his execution. In this he detailed the horrific pain he underwent and attested his innocence. The confession he gave was to stop the torture and while it lead to his death, it was false.





The Dark Charisma of Matthew Hopkins

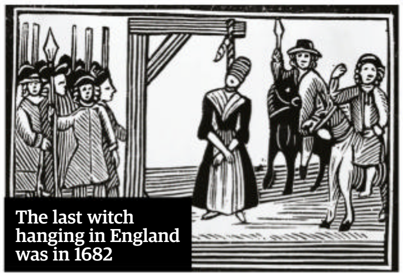
Operating as a self-appointed 'Witchfinder General' in the 17th century, Matthew Hopkins was strongly motivated to punish anyone whom he believed to be practising the works of the Devil

Words Derek Wilson and Harry Cunningham

Hopkins' methods of investigation drew inspiration from King James VI's book, *Daemonologie*

In all likelihood, the brief and bloody career of this persecutor is taken as proof that England in the 1640s was a cruel and superstitious place where witch mania was common ('All those vicious Puritans, you know!'). In fact, if Hopkins' activity proves anything, it is the exact opposite. Why do we not know of other dedicated witch hunters? Because there were none. Hopkins is a one-off. That does not mean he was unimportant. What it does mean is that we need, as best as we are able, to understand this maverick young man and the strange circumstances that allowed his three-year campaign to happen – because it's happened over and again throughout history. In every era histrionic rabble-rousers appear, appealing to popular anxieties and prejudices and scapegoating groups and individuals who are, supposedly, responsible for the ills of society. The victims vary – Jews, immigrants, the government, the EU, the 'neighbour from hell' – but, whoever the current 'them' is, the symptoms of this social disease seldom vary. So, who was Matthew Hopkins and what might we learn from him?

Hopkins (c.1620-1647) was the son of a Puritan minister at Great Wenham in Suffolk. He was put to the law and his training will have given him the ability to argue cases convincingly, as well as a good understanding of anti-witchcraft legislation. In 1644 he was living and presumably practising at Manningtree in Essex. There he came into contact with John Stearne, a man some ten years his senior. Stearne was a substantial landholder and it seems that the impulse to form their partnership came from the older man. Certainly, in his own apologia, published shortly after Hopkins' death, he denounced witchcraft in the strongest possible terms, 'to the end I might satisfy the opinion of such as desire to be further satisfied' (*A*


The last witch hanging in England was in 1682

Scepticism

Although belief in magic of all kinds was widespread and an integral part of folk religion, there was, in the 17th century, a small but growing band of thinking men who expressed doubt in the very existence of witchcraft and condemned the treatment of those suspected of it. As early as 1584, Reginald Scot had written *Discoverie of Witchcraft*, denying the existence of witchcraft, and his book was reprinted in the aftermath of the Hopkins' crusade.

The man who clashed with Hopkins head-on and challenged him in print was John Gaule (c.1603-1687), a Huntingdonshire Puritan vicar. After interviewing a woman detained at St Neots awaiting Hopkins' investigation, he voiced his misgivings to the local MP and explained them at length in *Select Cases of Conscience Touching Witches and Witchcraft*. He also preached a series of sermons denouncing the witchfinder. This led to serious questions being asked by assize judges in Norfolk and growing opposition to Hopkins and Stearne. Gaule did not deny the existence of witchcraft (he could scarcely do so, since it was mentioned in the Bible) but he was scathing of people obsessed by it. They proclaim, he said,

"... that witches not only are, but are in every place ... every old woman with a wrinkled face, a furrowed brow, a hairy lip, a gobber tooth, a squint eye, a squeaking voice, or a scolding tongue ... is not only suspected, but pronounced for a witch. Every new disease, notable accident, miracle of nature, rarity of art, nay any strange work or just judgement of God is by them accounted for no other, but an act or effect of witchcraft ... enough to send for the witch-searchers ... (a trade never taken up in England till this) whose [lucrative] skill ... is not much improved above the outward senses."

Such rational attitudes gradually prevailed, but it was 1682 before the last witch-hanging occurred in England.

Confirmation and Discovery of Witchcraft). As we shall see, there were several who questioned the witchfinders' rationale and motivation and Stearne asserted vehemently, and with copious biblical references, that satanic congress was the vilest of all crimes.

If Stearne was the primum mobile, Hopkins was the public face of the mission. From the fact that his fame spread rapidly, we may imagine him to have been a charismatic young man, personable of appearance, zealous in oratory and persuasive in argument. In a pamphlet written in his own defence he claimed that he did not deliberately set out to expose witches, but that in 1644 he became aware of a coven meeting every six weeks close by his own lodging. The local JPs examined one member of the group and Hopkins was among the witnesses of her interrogation. Having been deprived of sleep for two or three nights, the victim was pressed to summon her 'familiars'. As a result five grotesque, animal-like creatures appeared. One resembled a greyhound with an ox's head. When Hopkins told him to return to hell, he changed into 'a child of four years old without a head', who rushed around the house before vanishing at the door. The victim named other members of her coven. As a result 29 from the locality were tried and condemned. Four hanged in Manningtree had, Hopkins claimed, called up the Devil to attack him in his garden. When news of these incidents spread, it is not surprising that Hopkins acquired instant fame, nor that many local authorities throughout East Anglia called upon his services.

Hopkins is believed to be responsible for the death of around 300 women between 1644 and 1646

What are we to make of this weird story? Was it an example of mass hallucination? Did Hopkins and his accomplices stage a bizarre charade for reasons best known to themselves? Or were they the ones being duped by a series of tricks, such as some phoney 'spiritualists' were guilty of in later centuries? We can, presumably, disregard that last option, for what imposter would put on a show that could only end up in her own execution?

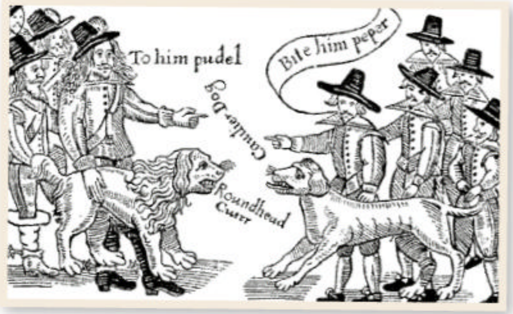
If we want to understand what was happening four hundred or so years ago, we must start by unthinking our own prejudices. We, in our secular, sceptical society are in a minority, both historically and geographically. For the majority of our ancestors and our contemporaries, some kind of spirit world was and is a given. That being so, it is commonly held, to quote Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, 'There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy.'

"For the majority of our ancestors and our contemporaries, some kind of spirit world was and is a given"

Defining moment

Civil War looms, 1642

The growing political and social tensions boil over in 1642 as parliament and the king go to war over the king's refusal to concede any of his powers. It is an event which must have influenced Hopkins.



Matthew Hopkins Timeline

Uncover the life and times of Britain's most notorious witch hunter

1620s

Early life
There are very few records available about Hopkins' early life, but we know he was born in Wenham, Suffolk as the son of James Hopkins, a vicar and had five siblings.
1620s

Lancaster witch trials
In 1633, Jennet Device, who had herself given evidence as a minor to denounce witches, is accused of witchcraft by ten-year-old Edmund Robinson. The case is referred to the Privy Council and the king's physician and the case is dropped, but the evidence of minors in witchcraft cases is now accepted.
1633-4

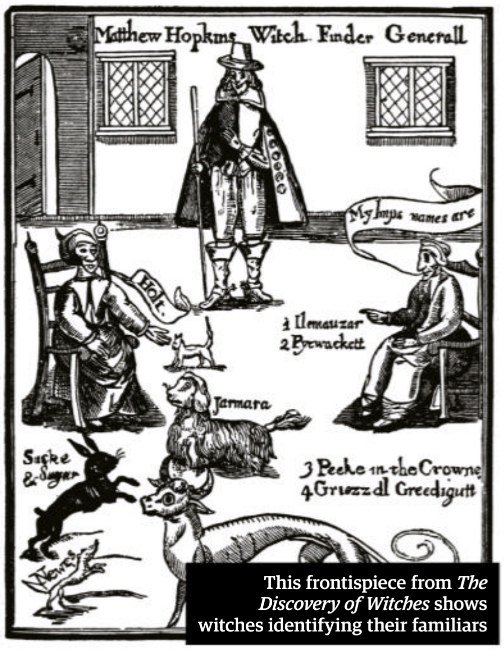
The neighbour from Hell
By 1644 Hopkins moves to Manningtree, a small town in Essex where suspicions and tensions run high. Before long he turns on one of his fellow townsfolk, an elderly and disabled woman, Elizabeth Clarke, whom he accuses of being a witch. She is hanged at Chelmsford.
1644

The witch panic begins
Hopkins begins rounding up more witches. 36 are tried in Essex in July 1645. 19 are executed, nine die in prison, one avoids condemnation by becoming a witness against her fellow accused. This began a series of almost 500 indictments in Essex.
1645

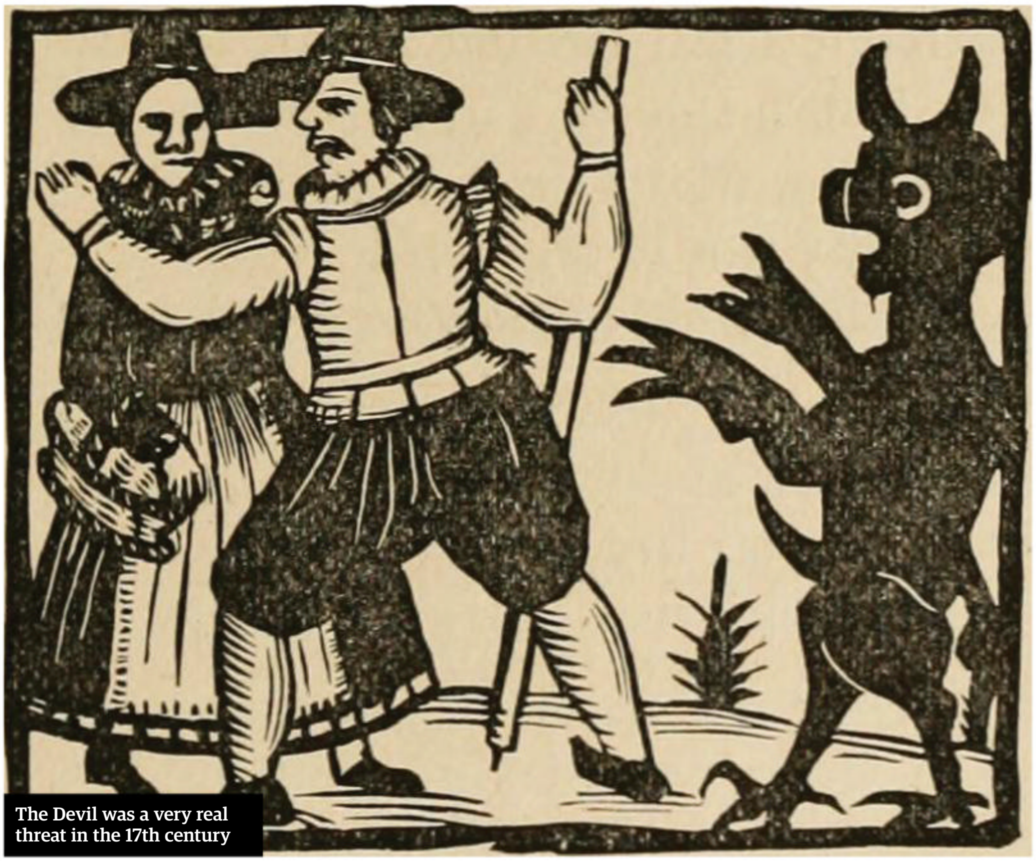
The vast majority of simple folk, educated people, religious teachers, theologians, philosophers and scientists believed in the existence of witchcraft. So did the accused witches themselves. The simplistic theory that all Hopkins' victims were good, honest folk who went to the scaffold protesting their innocence does not stand up to investigation. If you were a woman (or a man) at odds with your neighbours; if you felt that they were abusing you by word and deed; if you believed in the existence of the Devil and his angels; what more natural than that you would call upon supernatural powers for help to gain revenge? If you knew others similarly being ostracised, you might well join together with them for mutual support or even to practise more powerful magic. And if your persecutors suffered sudden misfortune, you would be very likely to feel the self-satisfaction of knowing that it was your spells that had been effective.

Hopkins appointed John Stearne as his assistant, who may have spent time as a witch pricker

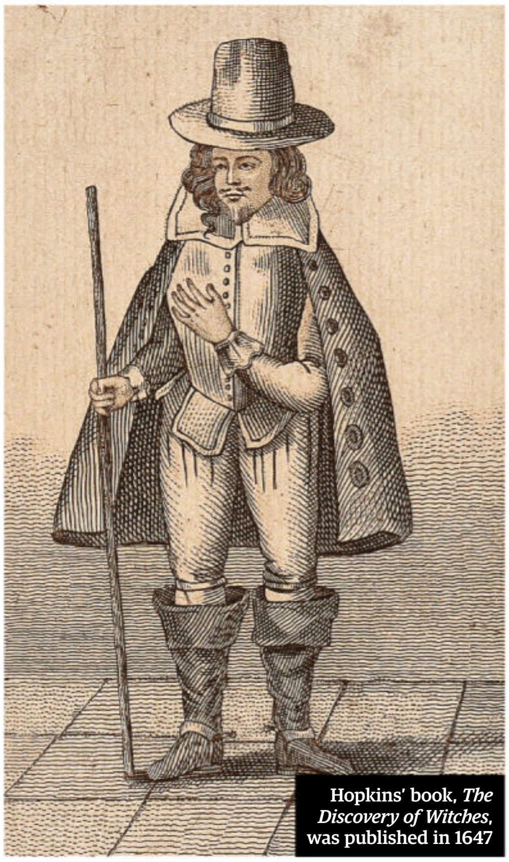
However, when all that has been said, there was obviously something different about the spate of prosecutions in which Hopkins was involved. Witchcraft trials had actually been declining until his campaign and they tailed off again afterwards. Moreover, the activities of the witchfinders often provoked opposition. The peak of prosecutions brought about by Hopkins and Stearne was against the general run of events. We can best understand it, I believe, as an angry protest by two strong-willed protesters against a society they believed was 'going soft' on demonic activity. Stearne's diatribe verges on the histrionic.



This frontispiece from *The Discovery of Witches* shows witches identifying their familiars



The Devil was a very real threat in the 17th century



Hopkins' book, *The Discovery of Witches*, was published in 1647

Civil War justice
During the Civil War the nature of the justice system is changed. The assizes courts are suspended and Justices of the Peace, who have limited or no legal background, try cases.
1640s

The Discovery of Witches
Hopkins publishes his book *The Discovery of Witches* which offers a manual for how to track down witches. It became a recommended tract as far away as New England.
1647

Impact across the seas
In the puritan colony of New England, settlers were copying Hopkins' techniques. Alse Young was executed at the Meetinghouse Square in Hartford, Connecticut merely for preparing herbal remedies.
1647

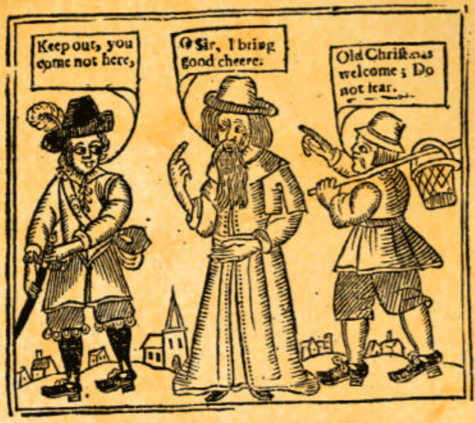
Death
Hopkins dies of consumption at Manningtree and is buried on 12 August 1647.
1647

1650s

Sowing the Seeds of Discontent
After the execution of Charles I on 30 January 1649, England is declared a republic with parliament and then Oliver Cromwell taking control. Witchcraft trials go into decline, but across the seas the American obsession with witchcraft begins. In New England, the notorious Salem witch trials were still to come.
1650s

THOU SHALT NOT

In the 16th and 17th centuries, Puritans followed a strict moral code in order to live a life that was centred around following God's laws. Thou shalt not...


Keep out, you come not here,
O Sir, I bring good cheere.
Old Christmas welcome; Do not fear.

1. Celebrate Christmas

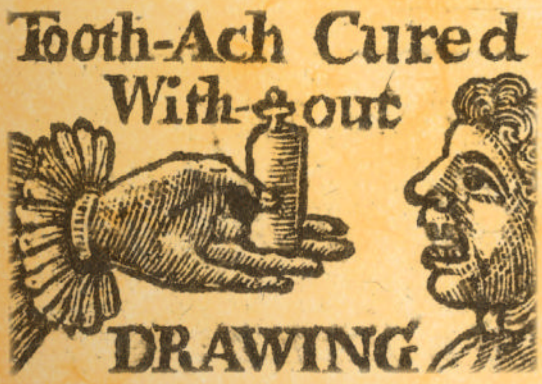
Puritans outlawed Christmas as they said it encouraged excessive drinking, dancing and eating and 'gave liberty to carnal and sensual delights'. During the Civil War there were riots in London as a series of shops that had opened on Christmas Day came under attack. Celebrations took place in secret.

2. Ignore the superstitions

Witches were part of a wider tapestry of superstition in the Early Modern period. Forgetting to carry a luck bone, getting out of the wrong side of the bed, tripping over, turning back to get something you've forgotten when embarking on a journey and dropping bread and butter with the butter side down were all considered bad luck.

3. Converse with papists

After the failed gunpowder plot, suspicion and hysteria about Catholics grew to extraordinary heights and an entire industry of anti-catholic pamphlets, playing cards and poetry sprang up, much of it hinting about the motives of Charles I and his French (and Catholic) wife Henrietta Maria.



4. Take your medicine

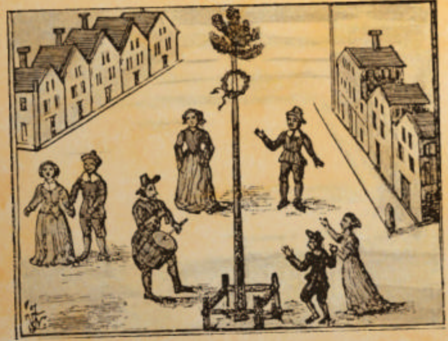
17th century medicine was a risky affair, not only because of a limited knowledge of the body and the risks of being conned by a 'quack', but because the boundary between magic and medicine was often conflated. Concocting your own medicine with herbs was enough to see you condemned.

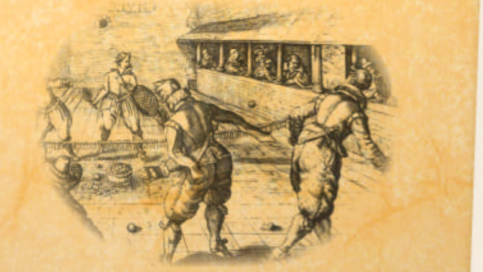
5. Go the theatre

Theatre was closed down at the start of the Civil War, perhaps because of its historic role in rebellion – memories of the 1601 failed uprising of the Earl of Essex still lingered. When the Puritans took control, they associated theatre with licentiousness and even prostitution, and thought the theatres were best left closed.

6. Dance around the maypole

The tradition of Morris Men dancing around a maypole was deemed too licentious for Puritans, whilst the ritual of women collecting flowers from the woods to decorate maypoles was particularly problematic as there was no way of policing what women 'got up to' in the woods.





7. Enjoy sports

Sports were viewed with the same suspicion as other gatherings: they encouraged debauchery when the emphasis should be on the teachings of God, but there was also a fear that physical exercise and competition might lead to the men committing 'sodomitical' acts. Many local olympics in villages were cancelled.

8. Mention Scotland

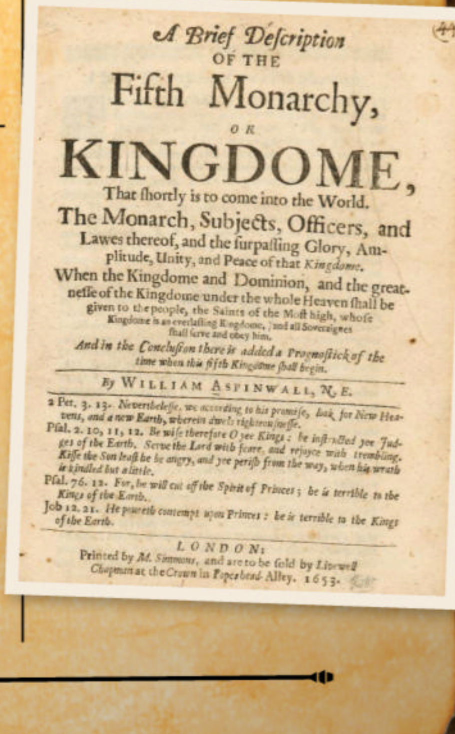
Scotland would not go quietly into republicanism and the Presbyterian Covenanters rebelled against Cromwell when he took control of England. They got as far as crowning Charles II as King of Scots at Scone before Cromwell mounted a successful invasion and took over the country.

9. Or Ireland

Ireland was often described as lawless and ungovernable during the Early Modern period. Cromwell mounted a brutal and violent invasion before introducing harsh laws against the majority Catholic population and forcibly indenturing many to go and work on plantations in the Caribbean.

10. Upset the Fifth Monarchists

Fifth Monarchists were an apocalyptic sect who believed that Jesus was about to descend and begin a thousand year reign, pre-empting the day of judgement. They became particularly obsessed with the year 1666 – the year of the beast – and were able to secure key positions for themselves in the Puritan regime.



(44)

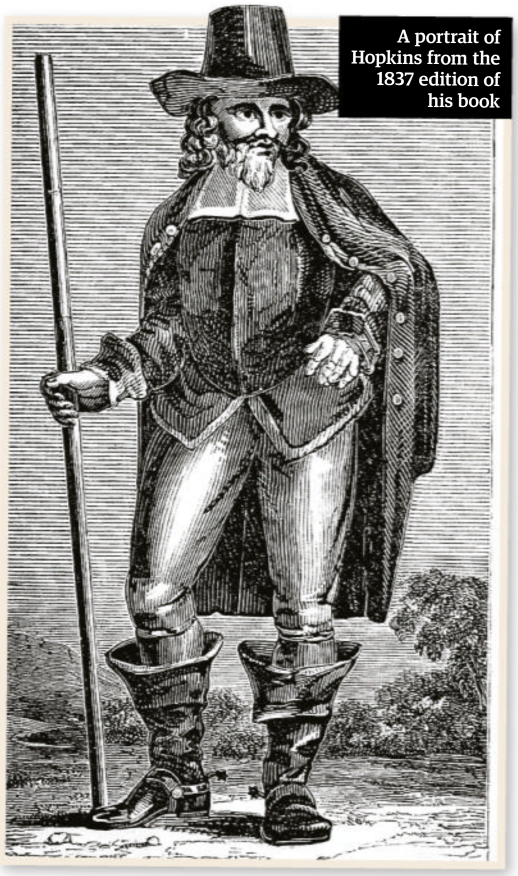
A Brief Deſcription
OF THE
Fifth Monarchy,
OR
KINGDOME,
That ſhortly is to come into the World.
The Monarch, Subjects, Officers, and
Lawes thereof, and the ſurpaſſing Glory, Am-
plitude, Unity, and Peace of that *Kingdome.*
When the Kingdome and Dominion, and the great-
neſſe of the Kingdome under the whole Heaven ſhall be
given to the people, the Saints of the Moſt high, whoſe
Kingdome is an everlaſting Kingdome, and all Soveraignes
ſhall ſerve and obey him.
*And in the Concluſion there is added a Prognoſtick of the
time when this fifth Kingdome ſhall begin.*

By WILLIAM ASPINWALL, N. E.

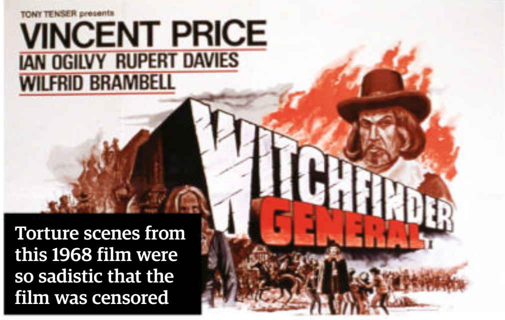
2 Pet. 3. 13. *Neverthele ſſe, we according to his promiſe, look for New Heavens, and a new Earth, wherein dwels righteouſneſſe.*
Pſal. 2. 10, 11, 12. *Be wiſe therefore O yee Kings: be inſtructed yee Judges of the Earth. Serve the Lord with feare, and rejoyce with trembling. Kiſſe the Son leaſt he be angry, and yee periſh from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little.*
Pſal. 76. 12. *For, he will cut off the Spirit of Princes; he is terrible to the Kings of the Earth.*
Job 12. 21. *He poureth contempt upon Princes: he is terrible to the Kings of the Earth.*

LONDON:
Printed by *M. Simmons*, and are to be ſold by *Livewell
Chapman* at the *Crown* in *Popeshead-Alley.* 1653.

Suspect were often imprisoned and interrogated at Colchester Castle



A portrait of Hopkins from the 1837 edition of his book



Torture scenes from this 1968 film were so sadistic that the film was censored

“Another test involved cutting the accused; failure to bleed supposedly indicated demon possession”

“Witches worship devils, they invocate them, crave help from them, work by them, and do them homage, sacrifice to them … [They are] the greatest idolaters that be, and are they then not more worthy of death?”

So insidious is this diabolical influence in society, Stearne explains, that he feels compelled to challenge those who insist that

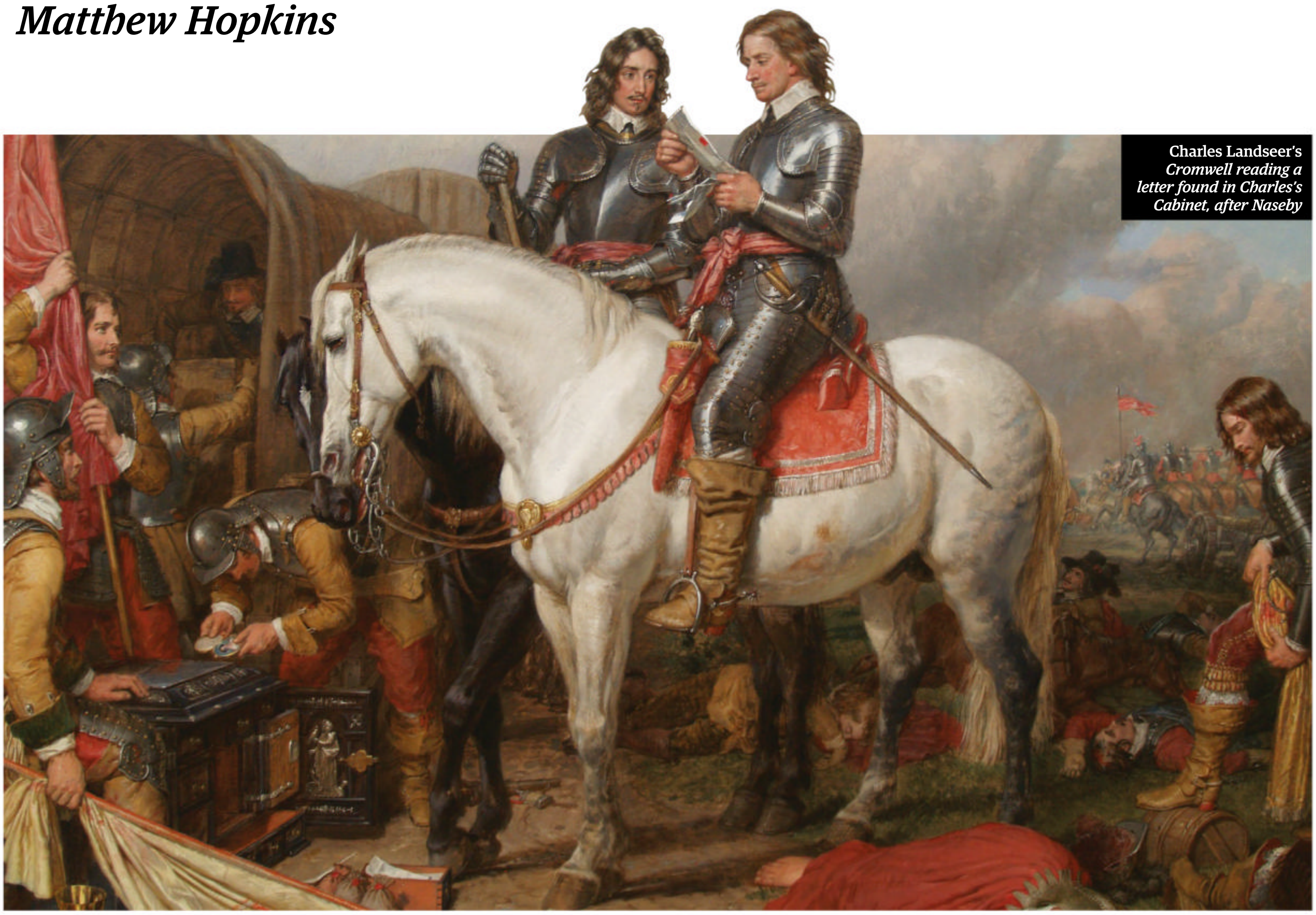
“there are no witches, but that there are many poor, silly, ignorant people hanged wrongfully, and that those who have … been instruments in … discovering those of late made known have done it for their own private ends, for gain and suchlike …”

Similarly, Hopkins, in his own defence, published posthumously, felt the need to rebut the accusation that he was in the witchfinding business solely for the money. He claimed that he only set up his stall in a parish by invitation and only charged twenty shillings (£1) per visit (roughly equivalent to six months’ wages for an agricultural labourer) - scarcely enough ‘to maintain his company with three horses’.

The Inquisition process involved a little cavalcade that moved from town to town throughout East Anglia and the neighbouring counties of Bedfordshire and Northamptonshire between mid-1644 and the summer of 1647. As well as the interrogators, a group of women went with the Stearne-and-Hopkins travelling circus to examine the bodies of subjects.

They were looking for the ‘Devil’s marks’ - an extra nipple or other excrescence which was often nothing more than a mole or skin discolourisation. Another ‘infallible’ test involved cutting the accused; failure to bleed profusely supposedly indicated demon possession. Swimming was another method used: the victim was tied to a chair and thrown into a river or pond. If he/she floated this was

Hopkins’ book was incredibly influential in the witch trials that took place in the American colonies



Charles Landseer's *Cromwell reading a letter found in Charles's Cabinet, after Naseby*

"Simply being a witch and, therefore, in league with the Devil, was sufficient to be found guilty"

After coming into his inheritance, Hopkins purchased the Thorn Inn at Mistley

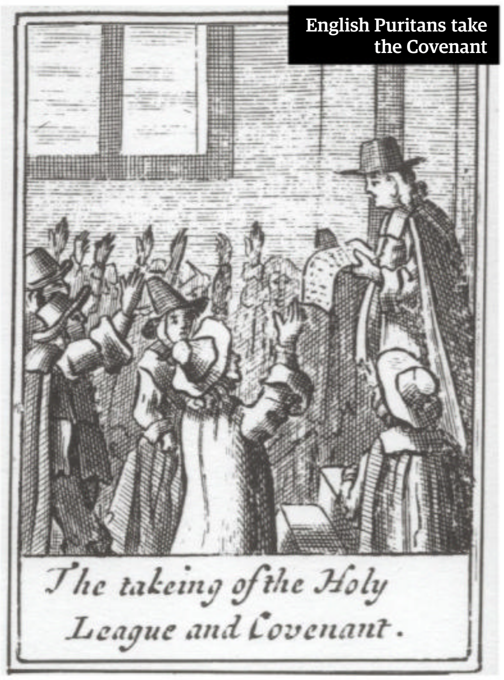
because water (a symbol of baptism) rejected them. Sleep deprivation, as we have seen, was another employed method of torture. As with heresy trials in Catholic countries, it was considered very important to extract a confession from the accused, employing whatever methods were necessary to achieve this. These witch trials were the closest England ever came to using the methods employed by the Holy Inquisition. But there was considerable unease about it right from the start, so much so that floating was declared illegal before the end of 1645.

There was and always had been a difference between England and Europe regarding the raison d'etre for the conduct of witch trials. Legislation before 1604 had laid emphasis on *maleficium*, harm inflicted on other persons by those suspected of sorcery. The Act of 1604 brought England into line with continental thinking and practice by making it an offence to 'consult, covenant with, entertain, employ, feed, or reward any evil and wicked spirit to or for any intent or purpose'. Thereafter, it was no longer necessary for the prosecution to demonstrate that a witch had caused death, physical injury or disease to people or animals or caused crops to wither. Simply being a witch and, therefore, in league with the Devil, was sufficient to be found guilty and suffer the consequences. This shift in emphasis helps to explain why investigators resorted more to extracting confessions. It was difficult to prove that a witch had harmed a neighbour and less difficult to induce him/her to confess satanic congress.

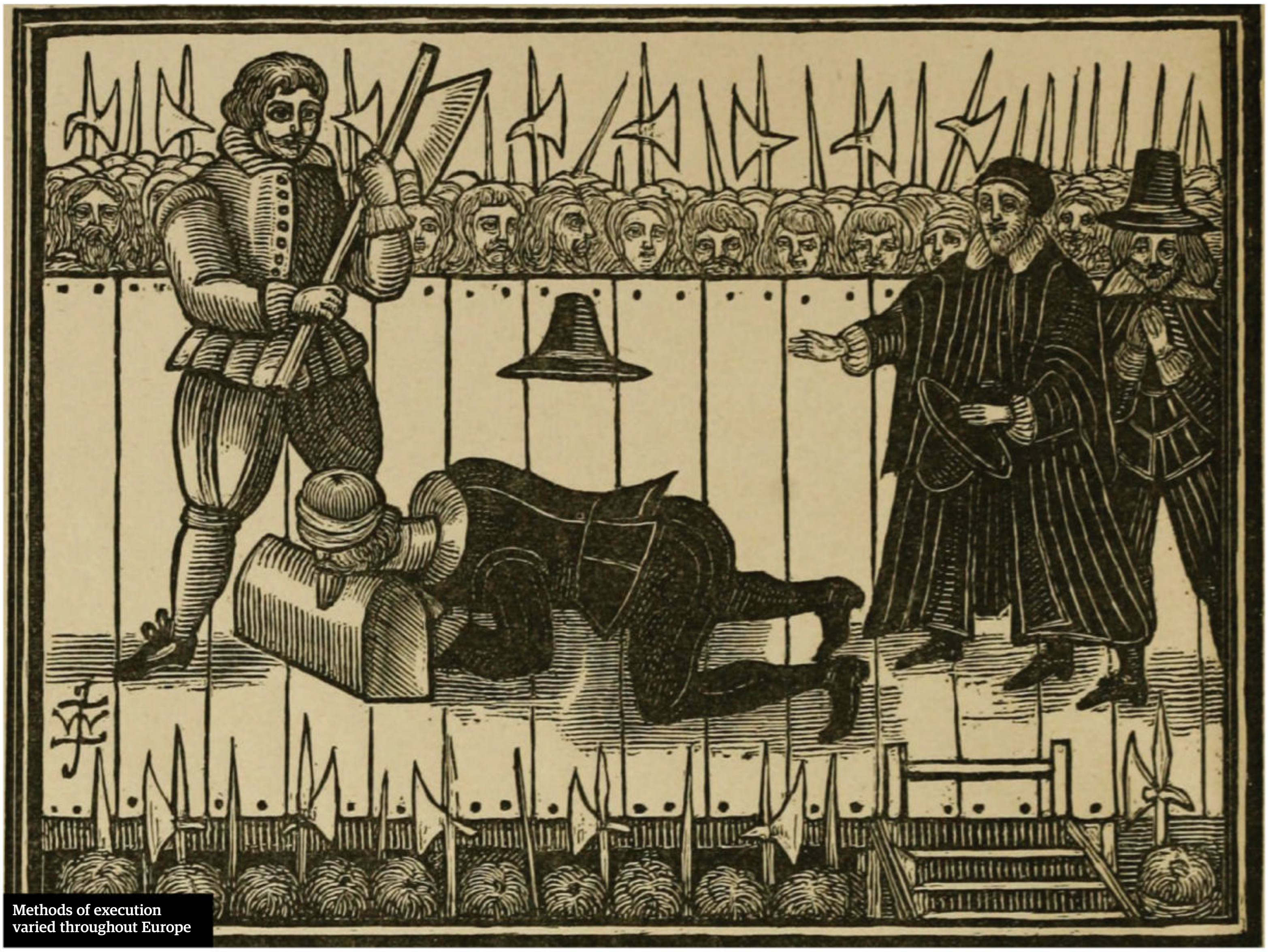
This being so, why was there not a marked increase in trials and executions after 1604? What was special about Sterne and Hopkins? What circumstances, in the 1640s, played into their hands? The witchfinders were playing on public fears but could only have enjoyed their brief reign of terror if the timing was propitious. The years 1645-1647 marked the most crucial phase of the Civil War. The nation was divided. The overwhelming victory of the parliamentary army at the Battle of Naseby (June 1645) marked the downfall of the monarchy and led to the capture of Charles I. The people had suffered in various ways as a result of the conflict and there was widespread anxiety about the future. More significantly the normal conduct of the judicial system was in abeyance. Instead of being conducted by assize judges, most witchcraft trials were presided over by local justices of the peace, who had less knowledge of the law and who were more susceptible to pressure from local people. In such uncertain times people are more disposed to look for scapegoats and to welcome potential saviours spearheading an attack on the spiritual evil that preachers and others blamed for personal and national ills. With the gradual imposition of parliamentary control, sanity returned. The power of the witchfinders was already being curbed before Hopkins' death from tuberculosis (he did not suffer the poetic justice of being, himself, hanged as a witch, as popular legend claimed) in August 1647. In Norfolk he had been interrogated by assize judges who questioned the reasoning behind his activities and his use of torture. Hopkins defiantly published his answers but by the time his pamphlet was available, the Witchfinder General was dead, Stearne had retired from public life and the campaign had ended as swiftly as it had begun.

By then, some 250 suspects had been tried at the instigation of Stearne and Hopkins and about 100 had been hanged. As an example of their reign of terror and as an indication that their victims were not only women, we may consider the misfortunes of the Reverend John Lowes. This 80-year-old rector of Brandeston, near Framlingham, was unpopular with his parishioners who resented his arrogance, belligerence (he once drew blood in an argument with a local man) and his 'popish' sympathies. They had tried, unsuccessfully, to have him removed by the bishop, so when he came to the defence of a woman accused of witchcraft, they took the opportunity to indict Lowes himself of being in league with the Devil. Hopkins took the hint. He extracted from two women currently on trial information that the rector was a member of their coven. He had Lowes swum and deprived of sleep. He made the old man run back and forth until he was utterly exhausted and ready to confess to anything that would make the torture stop. Lowes eventually admitted several offences, including sending a storm to sink a ship off the Suffolk coast. The priest was, of course, innocent of the lives lost at sea. Hopkins, by contrast, had the deaths of many innocent people on his conscience.

Hopkins' reign of terror coincided with the first English Civil War, 1642-1646


English Puritans take the Covenant

The takeing of the Holy League and Covenant.


Methods of execution varied throughout Europe

© Corbis; Alamy

The Witch Hunter's Handbook

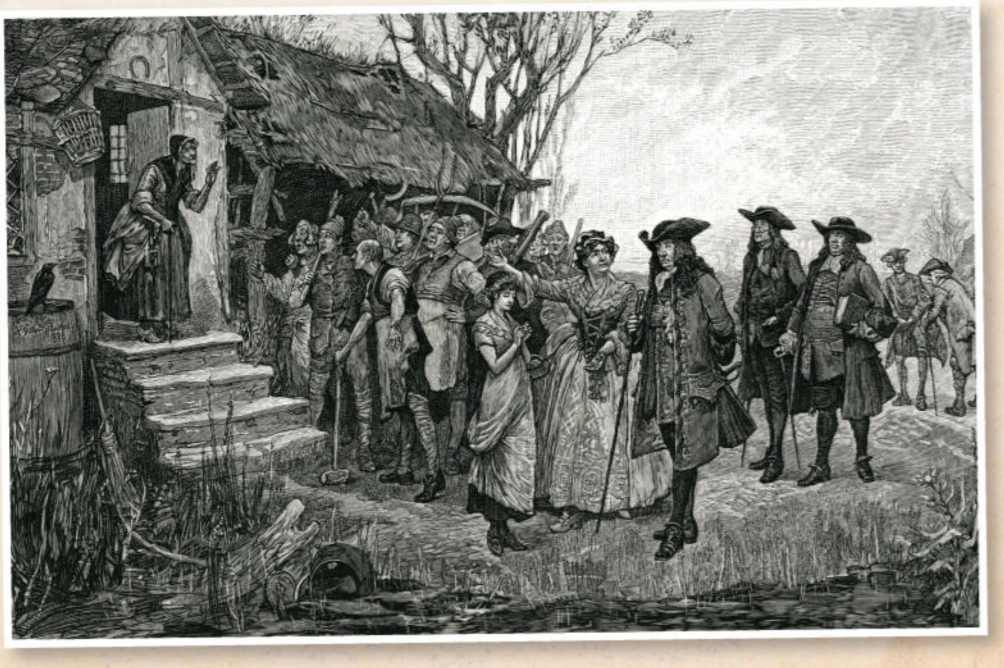
With Europe under satanic threat, no one was safe. Identifying and rooting out witches was of vital importance in the race to save souls and lives

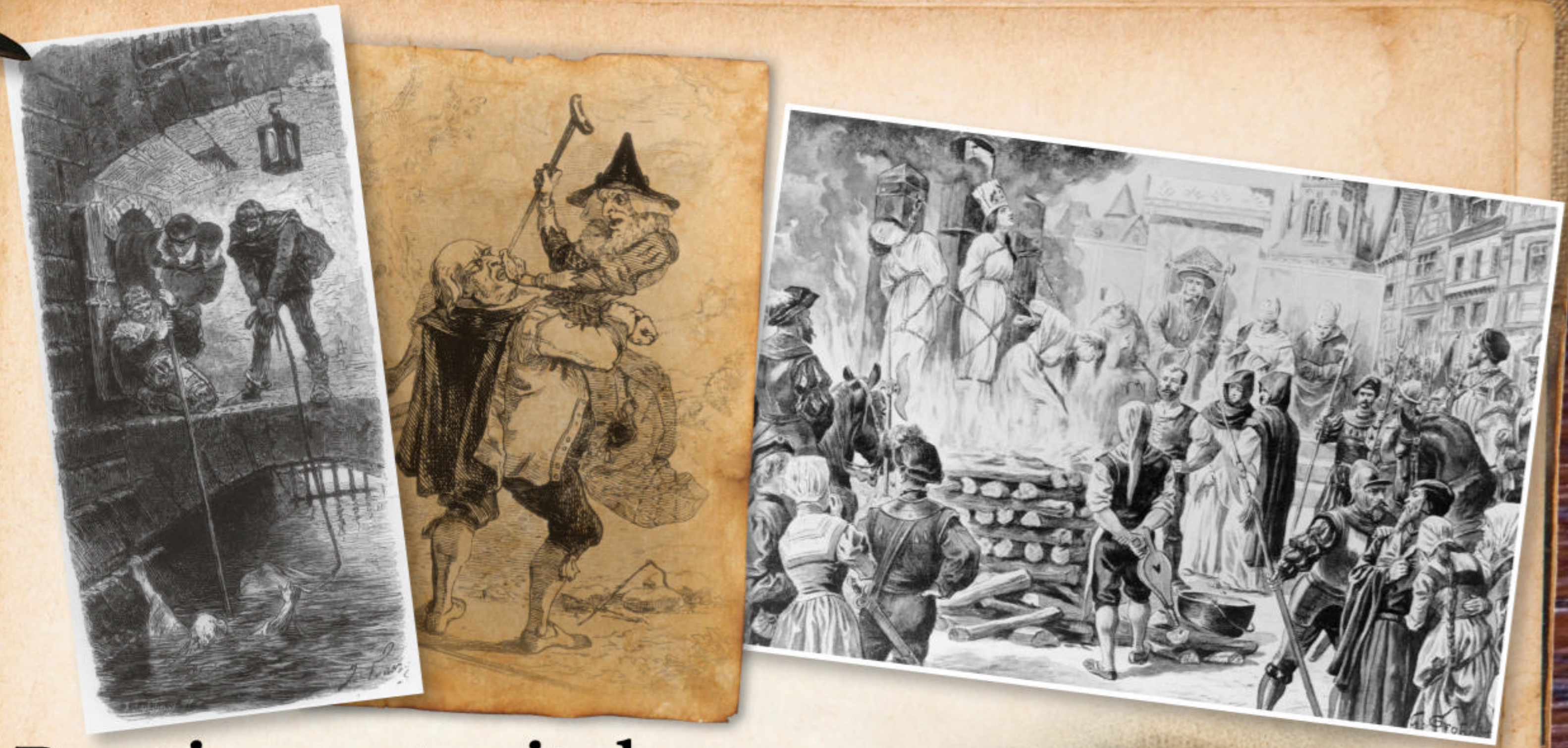
A witch hunter was simply someone who had, or professed they had, the ability to identify whether a suspected person was a witch. Operating in an official or unofficial capacity, witchfinders were found throughout Europe across the period of witchcraft persecutions, and were involved in some of the biggest recorded hunts of the time. These individuals emerged to fill a role that came hand in hand with the belief in the existence of malevolent witches: the witch hunter would move from village to village leaving behind a trail of arrests and executions.

Witch hunters came in many shapes and sizes; they could be men or women, young or old, and from a variety of backgrounds. Members of the clergy have been documented as turning witch hunter, and local lords or justices also stepped into the role. In Catalonia, local seigneurs called in professional witch hunters to deal with an outbreak of accusations, while in Hungary there is intriguing evidence of German soldiers accusing their Hungarian hosts during the military occupation there.

The time scale in which a witch hunter operated tended to be short, the career a self-limiting one, and their popularity and influence is most notable during periods of political and religious upheaval. The majority of witch hunters were invited into a community that already accused and suspected one or more witches, and there is very little evidence of a hunter instigating a witch hunt or panic in an area where there was not already existing suspicion. Indeed, although the hunters' activities helped fan the flames and led to an increase in persecutions, often resulting in a full blown witch panic, they did not tend to be the ones to initiate action. Their success therefore lasted only as long as they were accepted by the community that called them in: if they were perceived to have overstepped the mark or misbehaved, their influence and power was swiftly revoked.

Although some witch hunters were state sanctioned, in many cases those acting to root out witches were working with little or no official authority. Matthew Hopkins and John Stearne during the period of the English Civil War are one example of this, when they got into hot water for overstepping the very limited remit they were given to root out witches in East Anglia in the 1640s. Similarly, the Parlement of Toulouse sent three witch hunters to the gallows for financial exploitation of communities and pretending to have been given authority to root out witches.





Rooting out witches

Witch hunters were instrumental in some of Europe's most deadly witch hunts

England

1645

Matthew Hopkins, the self-styled Witchfinder General, moved through the communities of East Anglia during the Civil War period, rooting out witches with his associate John Stearne. Although torture to obtain confessions was illegal under English law, Hopkins used other dubious practices to make suspects confess, such as sleep deprivation and walking until their feet bled. He was also responsible for swimming John Lowes, a vicar in his eighties. There were rumours that Hopkins himself was a witch and got his knowledge of how to spot witches from a pact with the Devil. He was also said to have a book with all witches' names written within.

Spanish Netherlands.

1610-19

Charles Van der Camere, lieutenant of Bouchain in the district of Hainault, was by his own admission a prolific witch hunter: he claimed to have convicted more than 80 suspects in a two-year period alone. The lack of central control and loopholes in the judicial system meant that wily men such as Camere could take full advantage of the situation. In total, Camere is believed to have been responsible for the deaths of over 150 people. The execution of children as witches makes his reign particularly disquieting: out of 34 tried, 16 were put to death.

Basque

1608-14

With people running terrified from an outbreak of witch hunting across the French border, over 2,000 found themselves interrogated and tortured at the instigation of witch hunters in the Basque region during this period. In this mass panic there was little discernment between who was accused; lords, priests and villagers alike were accused and interrogated. Gender and age were also no guarantee of safety, with women, men and children swept up and executed. This period of terror finally came to an end when the Inquisition stepped in to investigate: when witchcraft could not be proved, the hunt was brought to a close.

Baden-Baden, Germany

1627-31

Dr Matern Eschbach, highly prominent councillor of the margrave of Baden-Baden, built up a reputation as a rooter-out of witches in Baden-Baden and its environs. With the area full of religious tensions due to the enforced conversion from Protestant to Catholic, in this full-scale witch hunt, Eschbach used torture to make suspects confess and the accusations of children were used to round up further suspects. Even government officials came under threat: the wife and sisters of the margrave's official were executed before Eschbach went for the man himself. At least 200 recorded deaths resulted from Eschbach's activities, with many others banished or imprisoned.

How to identify a witch

There were many ways for a witch hunter to identify a suspect as a witch. Some were particular to one area or locality, while others were common across many areas of Europe

One of the most well-known of witch tests, the practice of swimming a witch began in popularity on the continent. A suspect was bound hand to toe and lowered or thrown into water; if they floated, they were guilty, rejected by the water of baptism, and if they went under the water they were declared to be innocent. This method of testing for witchcraft spread to England through James VI & I's *Daemonologie* in 1597, but the first recorded instance of its usage wasn't until several years later in 1612 when Mary Sutton of Bedfordshire was swum and found to be a witch.

Weighing against the Church Bible was another popular practice throughout Europe to determine if a suspect was a witch. Those lighter than the Bible were guilty of witchcraft, as it was believed that witches were soul-less due to having sold their soul to the Devil. Oudewater in Holland boasted a famous weighing house to which people would travel from a great distance to prove their own innocence after being accused. Holy words were considered highly useful in identifying a witch: being unable to recite the Lord's Prayer, Creed or other religious words was another sign that the suspect was guilty of witchcraft.

The identification of marks on the witch's body was a common way for a witch hunter to identify a witch. Such marks were seen to be either a mark made by the Devil as a sign of the pact the witch had made with him, or alternatively the location where imps or familiars fed from the witch, again a sign of their suspect state. If these marks were pricked and the suspect felt no pain, this was a certain sign of guilt. It was also said that a witch would have a certain mark in their eye, identifiable only to those who were gifted with identifying witches. Another physical clue to a witch was the fact that their hair could not be cut.

Scratching a witch was another test that proved highly popular, amongst neighbours taking matters into their own hands as well as those operating as witch hunters. If the suspected witch didn't bleed or produced watery liquid instead, this was a sign that they were in fact a witch. Such scratching could be brutal, especially depending on which instrument was used to do the scratching, with the accused often left battered and shaken by the experience.

The Usual Suspects

Even without such tests, there were certain circumstances or conditions that meant it more likely for someone to be called out as a witch. You were more likely to be identified as a witch if you were:

1. Widowed
2. Living alone with a cat, ferret or toad
3. Very old
4. Quarrelsome by nature
5. Known for promiscuous or immoral behaviour
6. Talked too much
7. Strong-willed and outspoken
8. Didn't attend church regularly
9. Went about after dark
10. Had an odd physical appearance
11. Talked to yourself
12. Often absent from church
13. Known for uttering curses against people
14. In a property dispute with someone in power

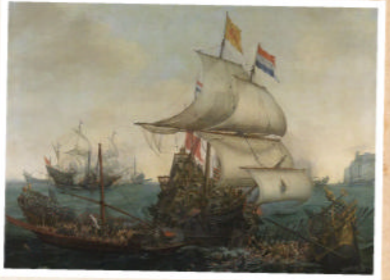
Burn the witch!

If suspected of being a witch, there was a selection of potential punishments on offer, from executions to torture

Fines

The purpose of a financial payment from the convicted witch to their supposed victim was not actually that of punishing the witch. In the majority of cases, fines served as a method of restoration, a symbolic and practical sign that the accused was repentant and that matters had been put right between the two parties, with order and reconciliation restored to the satisfaction of both sides. This punishment was common in trials before village courts in Poland throughout the period of witchcraft prosecutions and also in Wales, where, interestingly, there were minimal executions.

Galleys

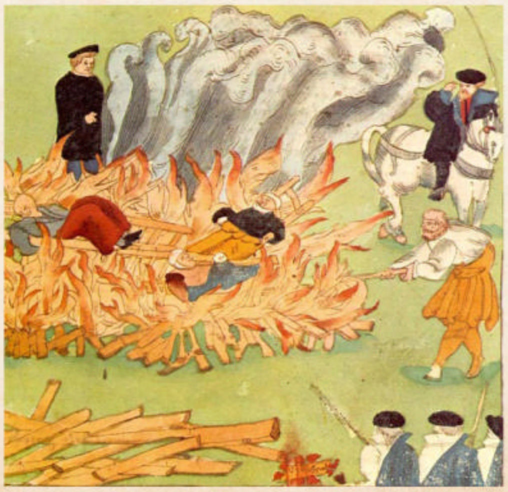


Although spared the noose or stake, being sent to row in the convict galleys was a hell all by itself: branded so they could not escape and with no rights and backbreaking conditions, they were used in battle to flesh out naval fleets of the period. The Parlement of Normandy sent convicted shepherds in 1684 to the galleys, and the Paris Parlement followed suit in 1687, 1688 and 1693, all for witchcraft and poisoning livestock. In 1779, a young witchfinder from Navarre found himself, rather than a witch, sent to the galleys.

Banishment

At first glance a case of getting off lightly, to those condemned to banishment for life, away from their family and homes, it was no easy option. There were also instances of the sentence being disrupted: the first witch case tried by the Parlement of Metz led to two sisters being banished. Locals took matters into their own hands however and the unfortunate women were stoned to death once they were outside the city boundaries. In Russia, convicted witches found themselves banished to remote areas on the frontiers: used to defend or farm for the Tsar, they were often able to have their families join them.

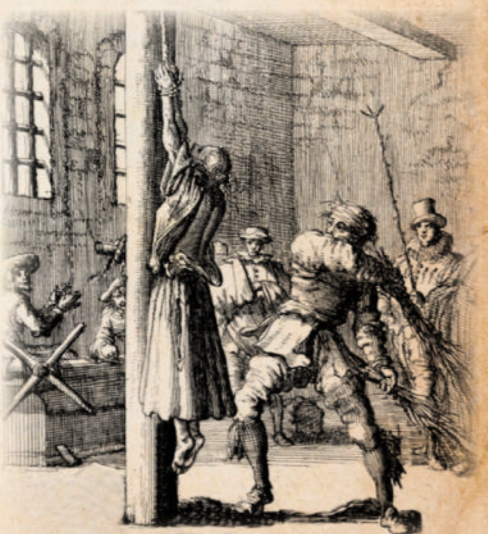
Execution



Obviously the most extreme punishment that a convicted witch could face, this was carried out in a variety of ways across location and time. Although it is generally assumed that witches were burned, this ultimate punishment could in fact be carried out in a number of different ways, varying across Europe. Many witches met their end at the gallows, and this method was used mostly in England, where only one witch is known for certain to have been burned. By contrast, in Scotland, witches were strangled before going to the flames. Beheading a witch was also popular, and, outside of Europe, stoning to death was a common mode of carrying out the death sentence.

Whipping

Being whipped or beaten was a lesser but brutal form of punishment for the crime of witchcraft. In Italy, the Roman Inquisition often used whipping through the street for the practice of love magic, healing magic and treasure seeking. In Poland, flogging was also used by village courts. In Russia, after torture was used to extract a confession, a witch would be flogged using bastinadoes or the knout, a leather whip. Love magic also resulted in whipping through the streets in Orbetello, Italy. 148 children were whipped during the Mora witch trial in Sweden in 1669.



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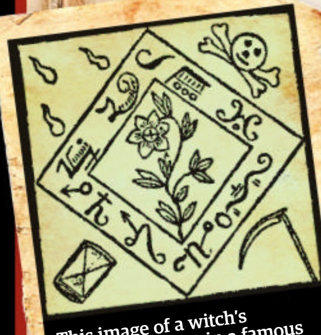
The Witch's Spell Book

Witches have recorded their spells and incantations and referred to them throughout history as ancient texts survive to influence modern practices



This image of a witch's talisman appears in a famous grimoire titled the *Black Pullet*

Since the concepts and practice of witchcraft date to classical antiquity, it follows reasonably that those who have concocted potions, chanted incantations, and cast spells throughout history should record their methods and makings for themselves and future generations.

While accused witches of the Middle Ages and early modern period were convenient scapegoats, targets for hunters who used them to explain the origins of famine, pestilence, disease, and other misfortune, they evidently were literate, capable of either reading and writing or availing themselves of scribes or associates who performed these services. It is estimated that roughly 80 percent of accused witches in 16th-18th century Europe were women, often old, poor and sometimes unattractive in appearance. Remarkably, so-called witches were also pioneers in medicine, chemistry, and other disciplines who managed to preserve their knowledge - their witchcraft - in writing.

Ancient Egyptians and Greeks laid down liturgy and literature on papyrus, referencing spells that required "an offering of frankincense" or the placing of an "uncorrupted and pure" child in a trance before a glowing fire. Dating to the 11th century, the *Picatrix* was originally written in Arabic, confirming the precept that witchcraft transcends cultural boundaries, and its more than 400 pages include some concoctions with disgusting ingredients along with spells, focusing on astrological energy in the pursuit of knowledge and power. Similarly, the *Galdrabók* originated in Iceland in the 16th century and contains contributions from numerous witches. Its 47 spells include runes purported to harbour supernatural attributes, and much of its content relates to physical healing for such conditions as fatigue, headaches, sleeplessness, as well as childbirth pain.

Although its exact date of origin is unknown, *The Sworn Book Of Honorius* is verified to have existed during the 14th century. Its oldest preserved manuscript dates to 1347. The work opens with a stinging rebuke of the Roman Catholic church, and its text that supposedly assists in the practice of necromancy, or communication with the dead. Witchcraft lore explicitly specifies that only three copies of *The Sworn Book Of Honorius* can be produced, that anyone who possesses one of these and is unable to find a suitable heir must take the text to their grave, and that those who ascribe to its teachings are required to refrain from keeping company with women.

Tangible evidence points to a substantial body of written witchcraft teachings that span the period from ancient times through the early modern period. Many of these have been exhaustively studied both for their genuine original purpose and their historical significance.

> "Witches were pioneers in medicine, chemistry, and other disciplines who managed to preserve their knowledge in writing"

Visions and mysterious volumes

Spellbooks come in all shapes and sizes, from leechbooks dealing with common maladies, to grimoires instructing how to summon demons

The body of written texts associated with witchcraft varies widely and includes books of magic spells called grimoires, medieval Anglo-Saxon medical tomes called leechbooks, and volumes of cryptic symbols known as sigils that have often been associated with sorcery or otherwise serve as the signature of a demon.

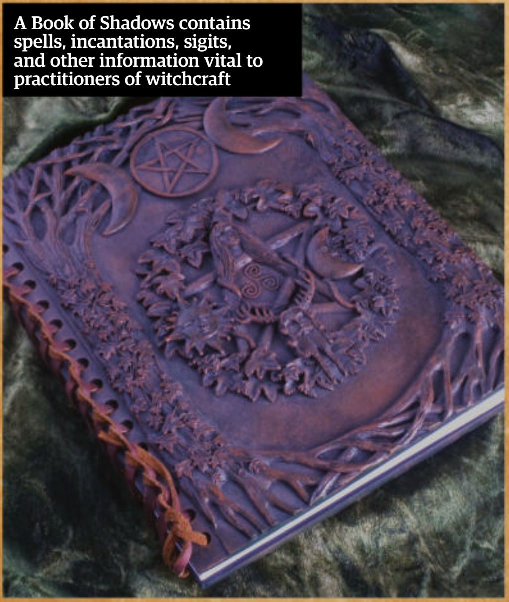
The grimoire is a general handbook for witches, and its origin is nearly as old as the practice itself. Grimoires include spells, incantations, instructions for making talismans and amulets, and procedures for summoning angels, demons, and other-worldly spirits. The earliest grimoires are believed to have been produced in ancient Mesopotamia and predate the 4th century BCE. An essential component of a witch's work, they have been produced across millennia, and the books themselves have at times been considered sources of supernatural power and strength.

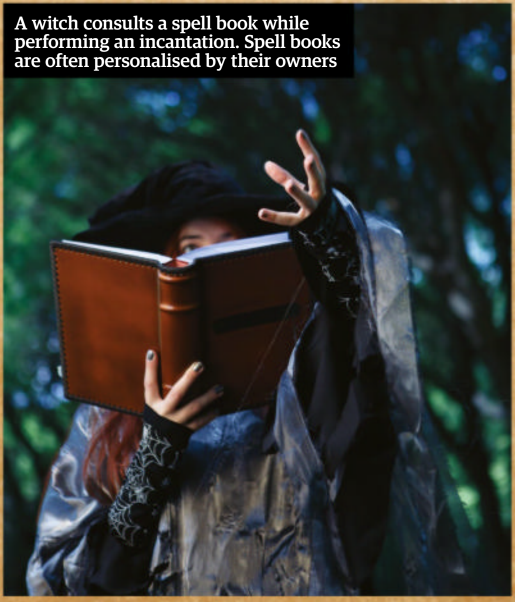
One of the most famous grimoires is the *Key Of Solomon*, which some have claimed to be authored by King Solomon himself. However, the work more likely dates to 14th century Renaissance Italy. Divided into two books, it exists in numerous translations, some of which contain subtle differences. A work of conjurations and curses, purifications, and other exercises, its content reflects a multi-cultural Islamic, Jewish, and Late Antiquity Greco-Roman influence.

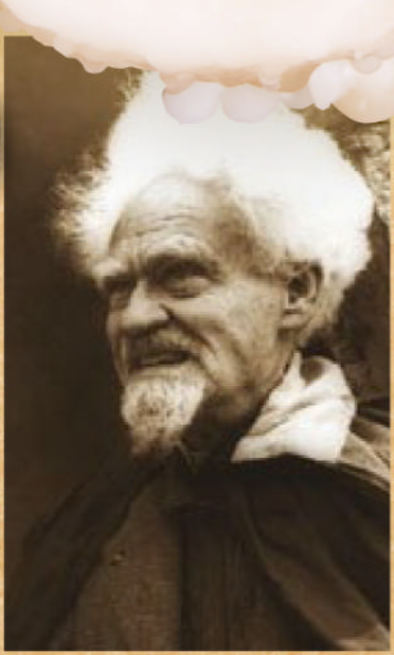
The best-known book of its type, *Bald's Leechbook*, dates to the 9th century, and a single manuscript, housed in the British Library in London, survives. Divided into two sections, the first dealing with external maladies and the second with internal conditions, the leechbook offers practical cures for headaches, shingles, and aching feet.

Medieval witches used sigils as representations of angels and demons that they might call upon, and the grimoire *The Lesser Key Of Solomon* lists 72 demons representing the hierarchy of hell and their corresponding sigils. Presenting a demon's sigil was thought to provide the witch with some degree of control over it.

The word grimoire comes from a French figure of speech meaning 'hard to understand'


A Book of Shadows contains spells, incantations, sigits, and other information vital to practitioners of witchcraft


A witch consults a spell book while performing an incantation. Spell books are often personalised by their owners



The Book of Shadows

Sometime during the late 1940s, Gerald Gardner, the acknowledged father of Wicca, wrote his *Book Of Shadows*, subsequently introducing it to the members of his Bricket Wood coven. While *Book Of Shadows* is a term generally used to describe a witch's personal volume containing their own incantations and rituals, Gardner contended that his book included information he had been given as a member of the New Forest coven decades earlier along with his own contributions.

Although he asserted that sections of the book had their origins in early witchcraft historiography, sections were actually attributable to other books as well, such as the *Key Of Solomon*, a text probably from the Renaissance, the *Gospel Of The Witches* written by Charles Godfrey Leland and purported to be the religious book of an Italian coven, and from the writings of poet Rudyard Kipling and occult practitioner and magician Aleister Crowley. Doreen Valiente, high priestess of the Bricket Wood coven, made significant alterations to Gardner's book after questioning its authorship.

Gardner stated that witches had been prohibited from putting their rituals and incantations in writing in earlier times due to fear of persecution, but they later began doing so. The publication of Gardner's *Book Of Shadows* spurred greater interest in Wicca, and the notion of such books has become a staple of popular culture.

Practising the witch's art

The witch persona revolves around a relationship with the devil and the ability to cast spells, predict the future, heal the sick, and place curses. After their arrest, accused witches were subjected to harsh interrogation and torture. Confessions were extracted under duress, and they were often based strongly on suggestion, ranging from flying on brooms, poles or animals to meetings with the devil involving seduction, debauched ritual sex, and selling of souls in exchange for dark powers. Accused witches were stripped and searched for marks on their bodies, signs the individual was the devil's own.

Witches would cast spells for many purposes, from finding love to improving financial or social position, punishing enemies, and removing warts. Those willing to pay might purchase a spell for a good harvest. Conversely, witches were also accused of murders, including the deaths of children. During the Middle Ages, a significant climatic cooling period occurred – witches were blamed for crop failures, pandemic disease, and any increases in criminal activity that followed. After the Black Death swept through Europe in the 14th century and decimated villages, the attitude toward witches shifted from curiosity and tolerance to fear and persecution.

Curing any ailments from cancer to halitosis and poison ivy were other common practices undertaken by witches. Simmering the fresh root of a dogtooth violet or the tongue of an adder in milk and then drinking the concoction supposedly cured stomach ulcers, while an ounce of trailing arbutus leaves in boiling water, taken several times a day, cured kidney stones.

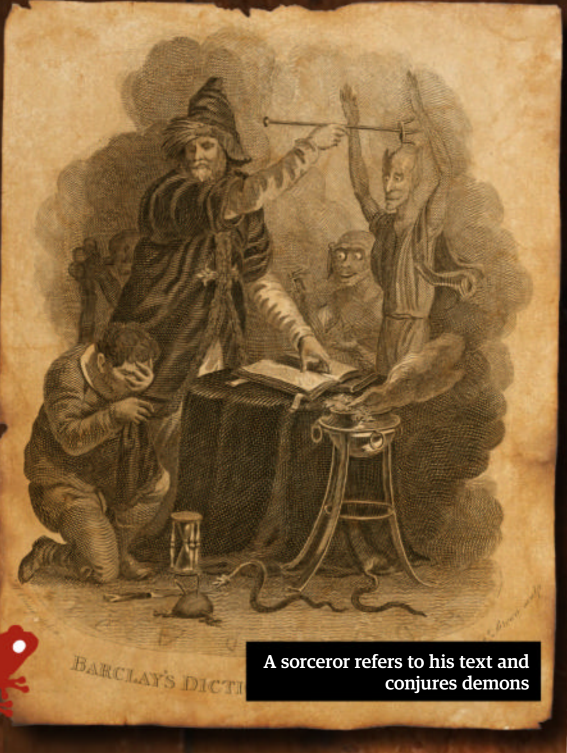
Perhaps the most infamous of England's witch trails was that of the Pendle Witches in Lancashire in the summer of 1612. Nine women and two men were hanged, and the entire affair began with a curse. A young woman either begged or asked to purchase pins from a local peddler. After she was refused, the peddler suffered a stroke. The woman confessed that she had sold her soul to Satan and asked the Devil to cripple the peddler. Curses ranged from simple to complex, involving just a spit of saliva, a written note later burned, clay figures or dolls, or a lengthy ritual spanning several days.

Despite this, witches were consulted for their clairvoyance or precognition. One English witch, Mother Shipton of Knaresborough, Yorkshire, is believed to have predicted the invention of trains, planes, automobiles, and the telegraph centuries before they appeared. Amulets and charms were also believed to be effective. Carried or hung in windows, these consisted of bags of herbs, sigits, or miniature everyday items such as nails or horseshoes.

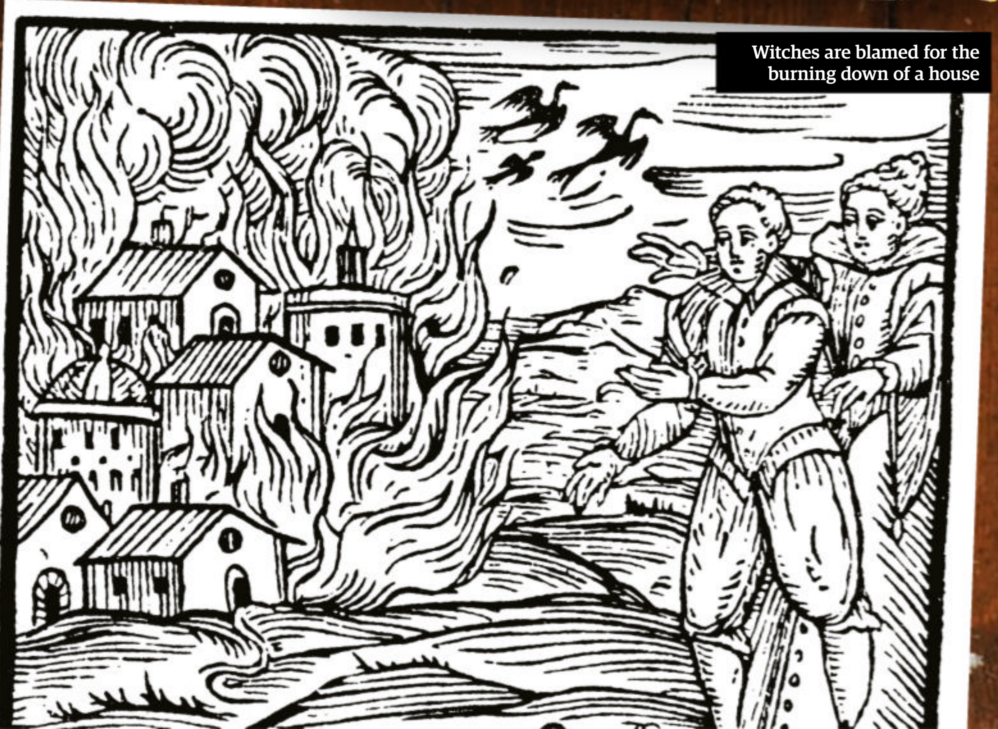
> Witches were blamed for anything from crop failures to the sudden death of children

Spells in a witch's arsenal

- Afflicted neighbour's children with strange symptoms and behaviour
- Conjured the spirit of a dead man
- Manipulated the weather to produce rain or snow
- Caused an individual to suffer nightmares
- Cast a love spell to win the heart of a man
- Cursed enemies with continuing bad luck
- Provided protection from diseases
- Rid neighbour of an unwanted husband
- Recovered a lost object
- Silenced a gossiper



A sorceror refers to his text and conjures demons



Witches are blamed for the burning down of a house

Protection from maleficium

Dead Cat

In Europe the custom of placing a dead cat within the walls of a house persists to this day. While serving as a good luck charm, the cat's remains are also believed by some to repel or lure a witch away from the premises. Although some have asserted that cats were once walled in alive, forensic evidence of dried carcasses suggest that the placement occurred after the animal had died. Dead rodents or birds have been discovered along with the cats as well.

Elf Arrow

The ancient elf arrow, actually an arrowhead made by Neolithic peoples, was believed to have been used by elves to hunt cattle and inflict pains, called elfshot, on humans. However, when recovered they could be used as charms or amulets, often worn around the neck and adorned with silver, to ward of witches. Elf arrows were never to be sought, but were found in unusual places. They were to be protected from sunlight to prevent their falling into the hands of witches and used for evil purposes.

Witch Bottle

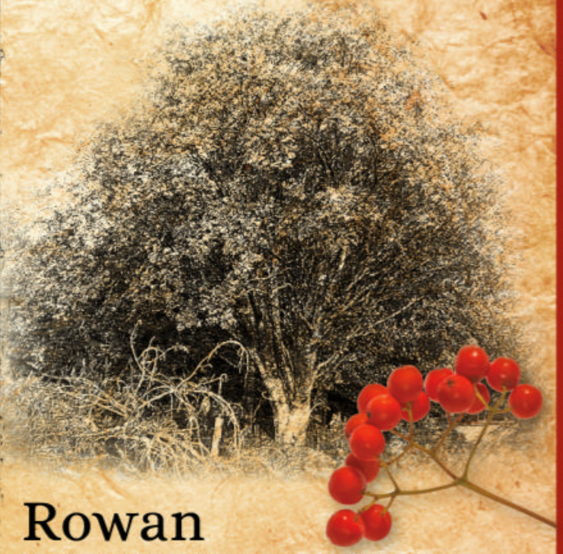
The witch bottle dates to the 16th century and provided a means of removing a spell cast by an adversarial witch. Sometimes prepared by another witch or folk healer, the witch bottle contained the victim's hair, nail clippings, and urine, and possibly rosemary, bent needles and pins, and red wine. Buried at the farthest corner of the victim's property, beneath the hearth, or in some other nondescript location, the witch bottle supposedly irritated the offending witch to the point that they would remove the spell.

Witch's Seat

Also known as a witch's stone, these were stones that protruded from the chimneys of homes. Their original purpose was probably to prevent water from running into the house between the thatched roof and stone chimney; however, through the years the stones became associated with witches flying about during their returns from meetings with the Devil. They supposedly rested on the seats. In the absence of the stones, the witches might descend the chimney and cause turmoil in the home.

Witch Ball

Typically made of brightly coloured glass, these spherical objects were popularised during the Middle Ages. Early examples were crudely made, but by the 19th century their production was improved with higher-quality glass. Sometimes hung in an eastern window or suspended by a thread, they warded off witches or trapped them inside the orbs. Folk tales suggest that witch balls also protected the dwelling from the curse of the evil eye. The balls were sometimes filled with holy water or salt to increase effectiveness.



Rowan

In Britain the rowan tree was said to be the tree from which the Devil hanged his mother. Planted near the front door of a home or elsewhere on the property, it was considered a powerful deterrent against witches. The physical appearance of the rowan, a five-pointed star or pentagram on each berry and a vivid red colour, was believed the source of its strength. Crosses were sometimes made of rowan wood and worn for personal protection. Pieces of rowan were also attached to cattle.

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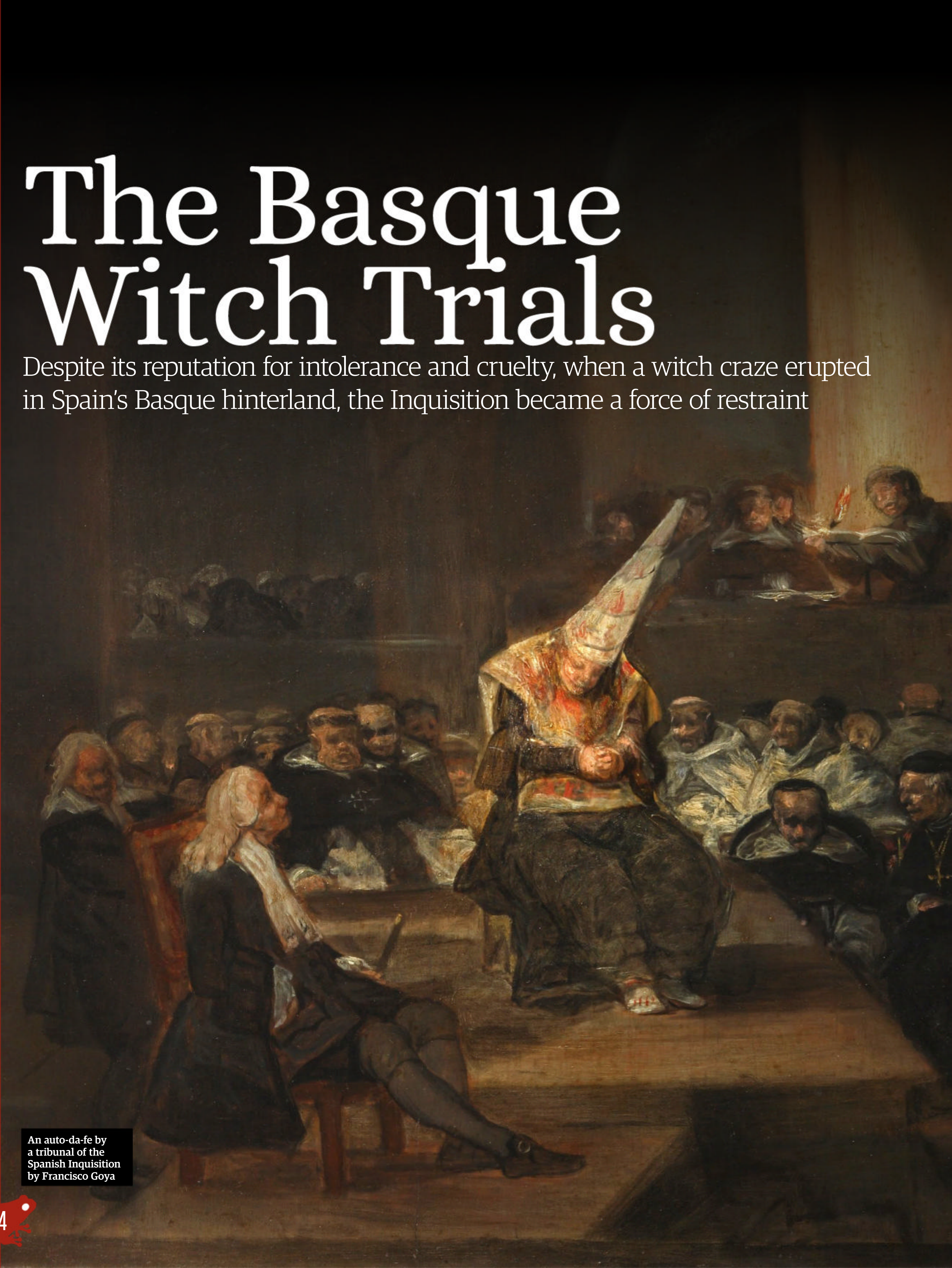
The Basque Witch Trials

Despite its reputation for intolerance and cruelty, when a witch craze erupted in Spain's Basque hinterland, the Inquisition became a force of restraint



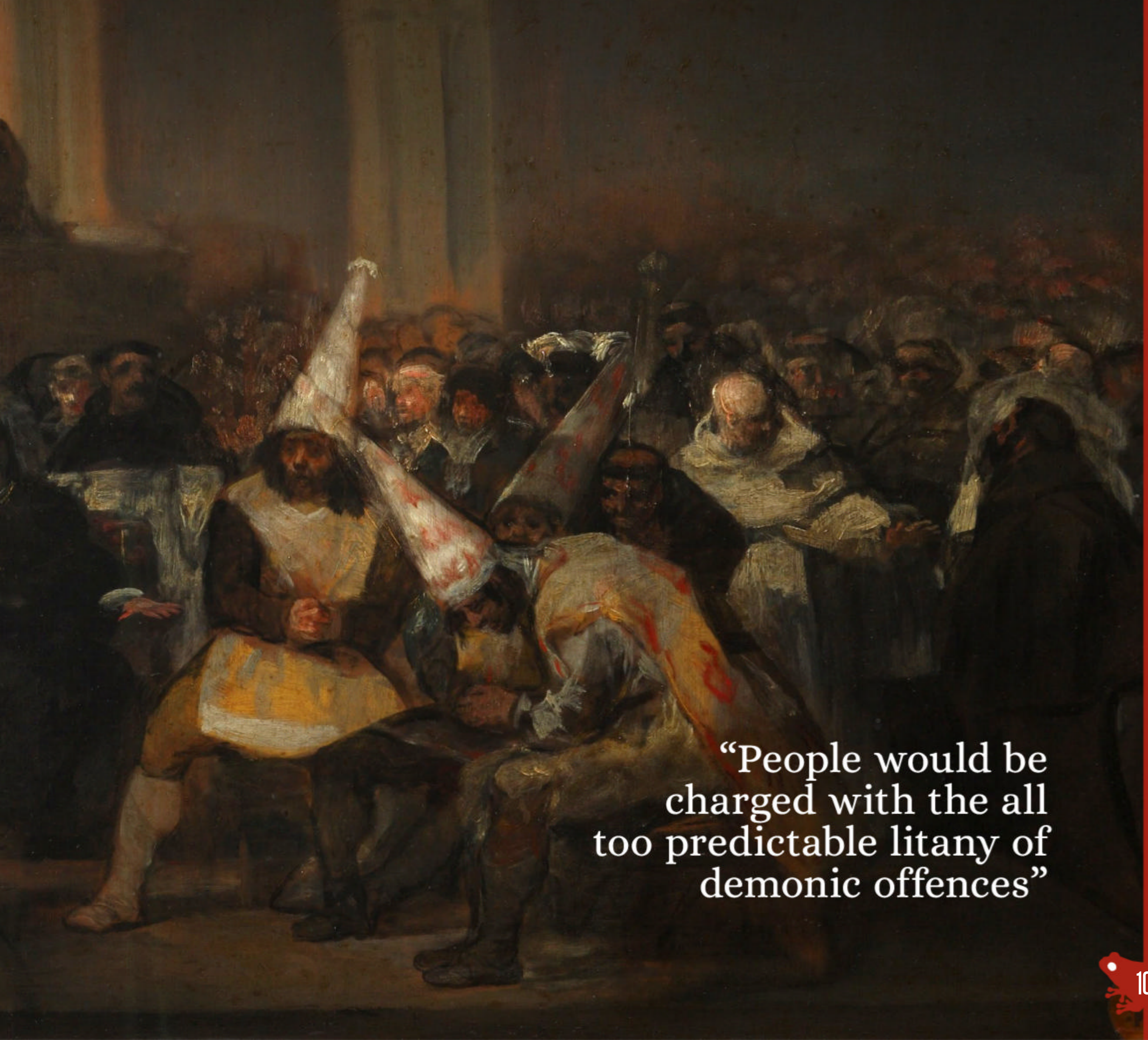
An auto-da-fe by a tribunal of the Spanish Inquisition by Francisco Goya

In November 1610, six people were executed for witchcraft in Logroño, a town approximately 75 miles from Pamplona: another five people, who had died in captivity, were burned in effigy. The local tribunal of the Spanish Inquisition had been sifting evidence and extracting confessions for more than a year and now, before thousands of onlookers, the hapless victims – people who had denied all charges against them – gave up their lives. The European witch craze had arrived once more in northern Spain. Mercifully, November 1610 marked the end of the killings but, over the coming years, thousands more men, women and children would come under scrutiny.

At first, this supposed outbreak of witchcraft was thought to be limited to a handful of villages, chiefly Zugarramurdi, but fears of an organised, wide-ranging sect quickly emerged. People would be charged with the all too predictable litany of demonic offences. Tales would spread of secretive night-time Sabbaths with their lascivious dances and sexual liaisons with the Devil: "Couplings so horrible," as one contemporary put it, "that it is a horror to tell." Murders and mishaps were blamed on the mischief of witches who supposedly scoured the local hillsides to find toads for their poisonous brews. Bizarre, nocturnal aerial jaunts were reported, with the witches sometimes transforming into houseflies or ravens.

In 1616 Salazar intervened when the secular authorities at Vizcaya launched a particularly vigorous witch hunt

From the outset, however, not everyone was convinced of the veracity of these sensational stories. Pedro de Valencia, the royal historiographer, suggested that "some of the things they have admitted are so improbable that many people will refuse to believe them," so perhaps it was wiser to "consider the whole story to be something the witches made up." Even some



"People would be charged with the all too predictable litany of demonic offences" within the Spanish Inquisition, which oversaw the trials and executions at Logroño, exhibited scepticism. Alonso de Salazar y Frías had arrived in Logroño in June 1609, appointed as the local tribunal's third and most junior inquisitor. A graduate of the illustrious university of Salamanca and with an impressive career as a canon lawyer well underway, Salazar was not slow to express his doubts. These appear to have been shared both by the crown and the Inquisition's central body in Madrid, the Suprema, and Salazar was charged with conducting a visitation of the Basque region between May 1611 and January 1612.

At the witches' nocturnal sabbaths in the Basque region, the Devil was sometimes said to appear as a he-goat

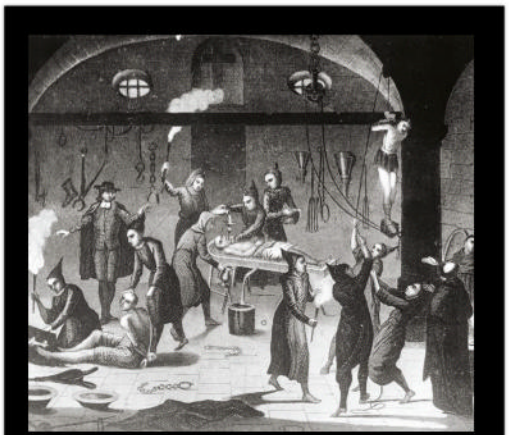
He conducted interviews with hundreds of people: both those who had confessed to practising witchcraft and those who had levelled accusations. His lodestone was the application of rigorous evidential tests: exposing animals to supposedly deadly potions, organising the physical examinations of women who claimed to have had sexual relations with the Devil, and comparing accounts of the sites of alleged Sabbaths with the actual locations. The results were striking: the potions killed no animals, the virginity of many of the women was still intact, and testimonies concerning night-time meetings simply did not tally with physical realities. As Salazar explained in one of a series of reports to the Suprema, far too much was "false, fake and fraudulent," so "the witches are not to be believed." What, though, could have possessed people to tell such self-incriminatory stories about themselves? Perhaps, he opined, they were delusional, not diabolical. If the Devil was at work, his methods were subtle indeed.

The 80-year-old Maria de Echevarría of Oronóz, for example, had made a confession out of "heartfelt contrition," but "what this good woman was confessing about her witchcraft was, without doubt, nothing but a dream." She claimed to have fallen asleep and then been whisked away to Sabbaths, and yet "nobody ever met or saw her leaving or return, not even her own elderly daughter who slept in the same bed." Another woman insisted that, after surrendering to Satan, three toes had been taken from her left foot but, after a little prodding of her acquaintances, it became clear that she had lacked the toes since infancy.

Salazar was blunt. "I have not found a single proof, nor even the slightest indication, from which to infer that an act of witchcraft has actually happened." The accusers, often acting out of malice, could not be trusted and the accused were either caught up in fantasy or had been "weakened by the fierce inducements and sinister methods used

"The accusers, often acting out of malice, could not be trusted and the accused were caught up in fantasy"

A cave at Zugarramurdi where witches were alleged to have participated in their nocturnal rituals



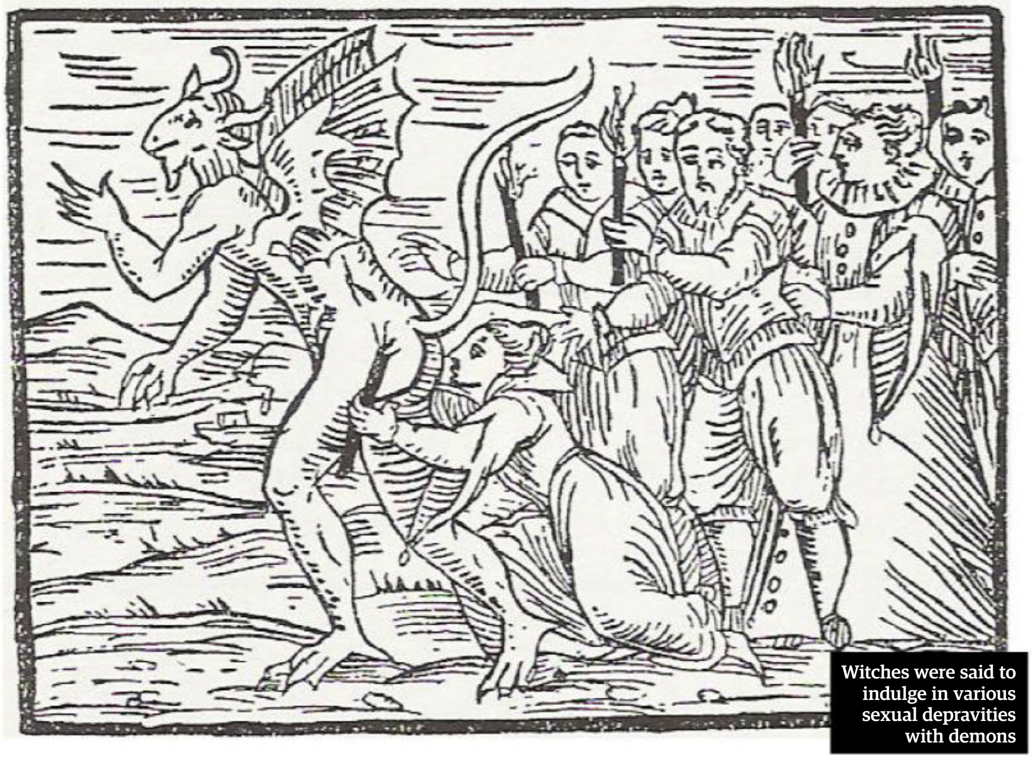
What to Expect From the Spanish Inquisition

I. Raising the alarm
The Inquisition tended to deal with witchcraft on an ad hoc basis rather than through regular visits to local areas. Reports of sinister activities would usually first come to the attention of a parish priest – either through confessions or accusations. If convinced of their credibility, the priest would conduct interviews and report his initial findings to the local tribunal of the Inquisition.

II. Enter the Inquisition
The officers of the local tribunal would call for the transfer of suspects to the Inquisition's jails and begin to examine evidence. This involved the quizzing of witnesses, the consultation of precedents and, crucially, attempts to secure confessions from the accused. The local tribunal was also expected to inform the Inquisition's supreme council, the Suprema, in Madrid of its progress. Two options were now available:
a) to dismiss the charges, or
b) to proceed to formal prosecution.

III. Judgement
The rule of thumb was that if a person confessed to practising witchcraft he or she would receive penances, often handed down at public assemblies, and be reconciled to the Church. The death penalty was hardly ever imposed in such circumstances. If a person denied being a witch, even though the Inquisition was convinced of his or her guilt, the possibility of more severe punishments arose. On the rare occasions when executions were ordered by the Inquisition, the deaths would take place in large public ceremonies. The consequences for the families of victims were serious: many aspects of involvement in public life, owning property, and social interaction could be curtailed for generations.

IV. Spreading the net
In the wake of these initial investigations, a local tribunal might be convinced that an organised and widespread witchcraft sect existed. This was the case with the Basque trials. Under these circumstances, agents of the Inquisition would be sent out with the express purpose of unearthing more guilty parties and assessing the reliability of accusations. The cycle would begin again.



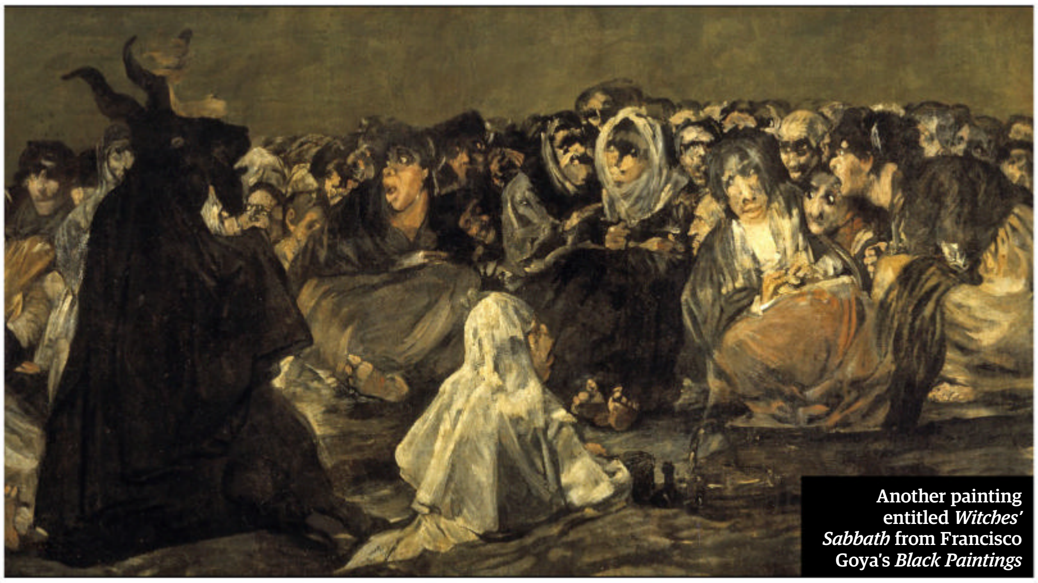
Witches were said to indulge in various sexual depravities with demons

to extort their declarations." A climate of fear and paranoia had provided "a reason for everything to be immediately thought of as witchcraft. This grows at every telling and today, in fact, there is no fainting fit, illness, death or accident that is not attributed to witches." The fact that, at the very same time, a witch-hunting frenzy had been raging on the French side of the border had only added to the mood of panic.

During his visitation, Salazar was armed with an edict of grace, which allowed him to reconcile to the Church anyone who confessed their supposed crimes. Some 1,802 people received this dispensation from Salazar: 1,384 of them children under the age of 14. Moreover, his reports confirmed the Suprema's growing belief that events in northern Spain had spiralled hopelessly out of control. Salazar suggested that the Inquisition should "make known its deep regret for the ill treatment suffered by the accused," and argued that "all confessions and testimonies in the present witchcraft case are to be declared invalid." The Suprema heeded his advice and swiftly issued instructions about how future investigations ought to be conducted: facts were to be checked and re-checked and, at every turn, attention was to be paid to the constant "doubt prevailing in these cases." Most pleasingly of all, the people who had perished at Logroño in 1610 were exonerated.

Unsurprisingly, not everyone was delighted by Salazar's manoeuvres. One of his critics could not "understand how any sensible and intelligent person can bring himself to doubt the truth." Everyone surely realised that witchcraft was a real and urgent threat since this "has been absolutely proved and acknowledged by all the scholars in Christendom." Salazar was acting on "no other basis than his own volition." Others suggested that Salazar was himself being toyed with – or was even in league with – the Devil. Such assaults make it very tempting to position Salazar as a forward-thinking trailblazer of rationalist attitudes towards witchcraft, perhaps even to see him as something of maverick. A little caution is required, however. He was neither as progressive, nor as out-of-step with his times, as has sometimes been suggested.

First, Salazar was not questioning the fundamental notion that witchcraft existed, or that it was the result of dangerous alliances with the Devil. He simply concluded that it was not being practised on an epic scale in the specific case of northern Spain in the first and second decades of the 17th century. "The real question," as he put it, was "are we to believe that witchcraft has occurred… simply because the witches say so?" The evidence told him no, and he acted as he did because of a sharp legal mind rather than a tender heart or some kind of proto-modern sensibility.



Another painting entitled *Witches' Sabbath* from Francisco Goya's *Black Paintings*

Some believed that witches snuck through tiny wall openings or transform into animals to suck the blood of babies

Secondly, it would be erroneous to assume that Salazar was unusual in his sceptical attitude towards charges of witchcraft. The Spanish Inquisition's reputation might lead us to assume that it was endlessly pursuing practitioners of the occult and subjecting them to horrendous punishments. We would be mistaken. It is certainly true that during the decades following the Spanish Inquisition's foundation in the late 15th century, witchcraft was perceived as a matter of grave concern. Witches could readily be perceived as a target of the tribunal's mission to eradicate heresy: they were abandoning their baptismal vows by offering fealty to the Devil and they were reputed to abuse holy words and holy objects in their rituals. The first burnings occurred during the 1490s and some of the local branches of the Inquisition, notably at Saragossa, adopted a stern approach to any whispers of witchcraft. From quite early on, however, a cautious attitude, not dissimilar to Salazar's, developed. The default position for many inquisitors was that witches were likely to be deluded rather than genuine acolytes of Satan and by the mid-1520s detailed rules of enquiry were being enforced. The duty, as one edict from the Suprema insisted, was to determine whether the person who confessed to witchcraft had "really and truly committed the crime they have confessed, or whether they are in fact fooled."

Strikingly, the procedures of the Spanish Inquisition were relatively lenient in witchcraft cases. The ecclesiastical authorities of Protestant Northern Europe were often a good deal tougher. In Spain, torture was not routinely applied, property was typically not seized from the accused, and the death penalty was rarely

© Corbis, Alamy

pursued. Local tribunals did occasionally adopt more aggressive methods but these were often frowned upon by the Suprema. The last execution of a witch by agents of the Inquisition took place in Aragon in the mid-1530s, and in Catalonia in the late 1540s. Tribunals in the south of Spain hardly ever concerned themselves with cases of witchcraft. Even the Saragossa tribunal, after intolerant beginnings, only dealt with a handful of magic and witchcraft accusations between 1550 and 1600, and no death sentences were passed down. In 1568 someone was sentenced to the galleys for teaching spells; in 1574 a soothsayer was whipped. Only a single case concerning what could be construed as fully-fledged witchcraft came to judgement during these five decades, when a 30-year old woman, charged with killing animals and people through malevolent magic, was whipped and banished for four years.

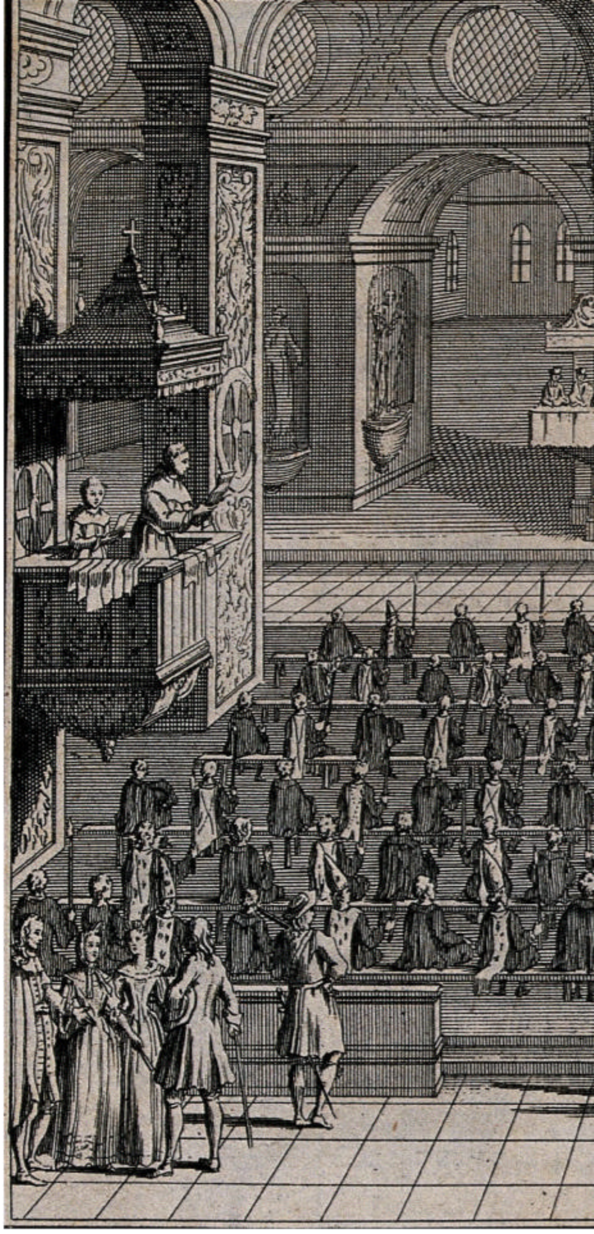
Across the Iberian peninsula, in fact, the vast majority of executions for witchcraft were conducted by the secular authorities and the Inquisition's relatively restrained approach was replicated in other Mediterranean countries. In Venice, for example, the local tribunal dealt with more than 600 trials related to magic between 1550 and 1650: the vast majority resulted in acquittals and there was not a single execution.

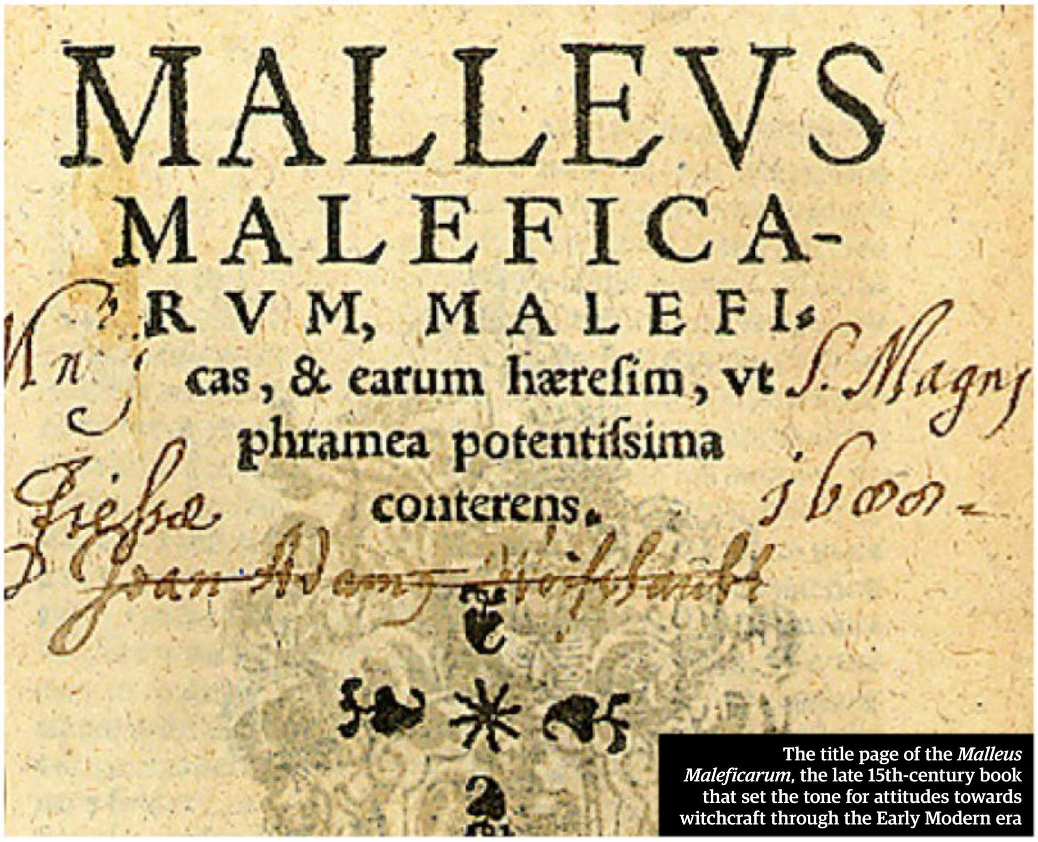
Events in the Basque country between 1609 and 1614 were, in a sense, an aberration. The complicity of the Suprema in the early stages of the persecution was out of character, and quickly shifted to a more measured approach. This is precisely why Salazar was dispatched on his visitation. The region had, admittedly, always sustained a reputation as a hotbed of witchcraft and outbreaks of persecution were hardly unknown. Still, when Salazar voiced his concerns, he was reacting to the overzealous strategies of his local superiors and sustaining a long trend of caution and scepticism.

None of this diminishes the significance of Salazar's work. Early Modern Europe had developed

The Spanish Inquisition tried 5,000 people for using magic between 1610 and 1700: none of them were burned

> “The region had, admittedly, always sustained a reputation as a hotbed of witchcraft”





MALLEVS
MALEFICA-
RVM, MALEFI-
cas, & earum hæreſim, vt
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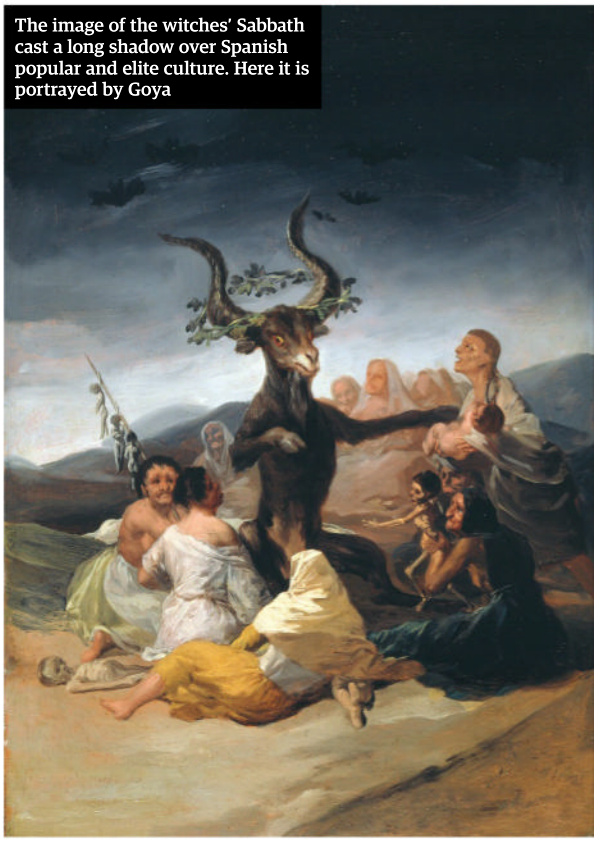
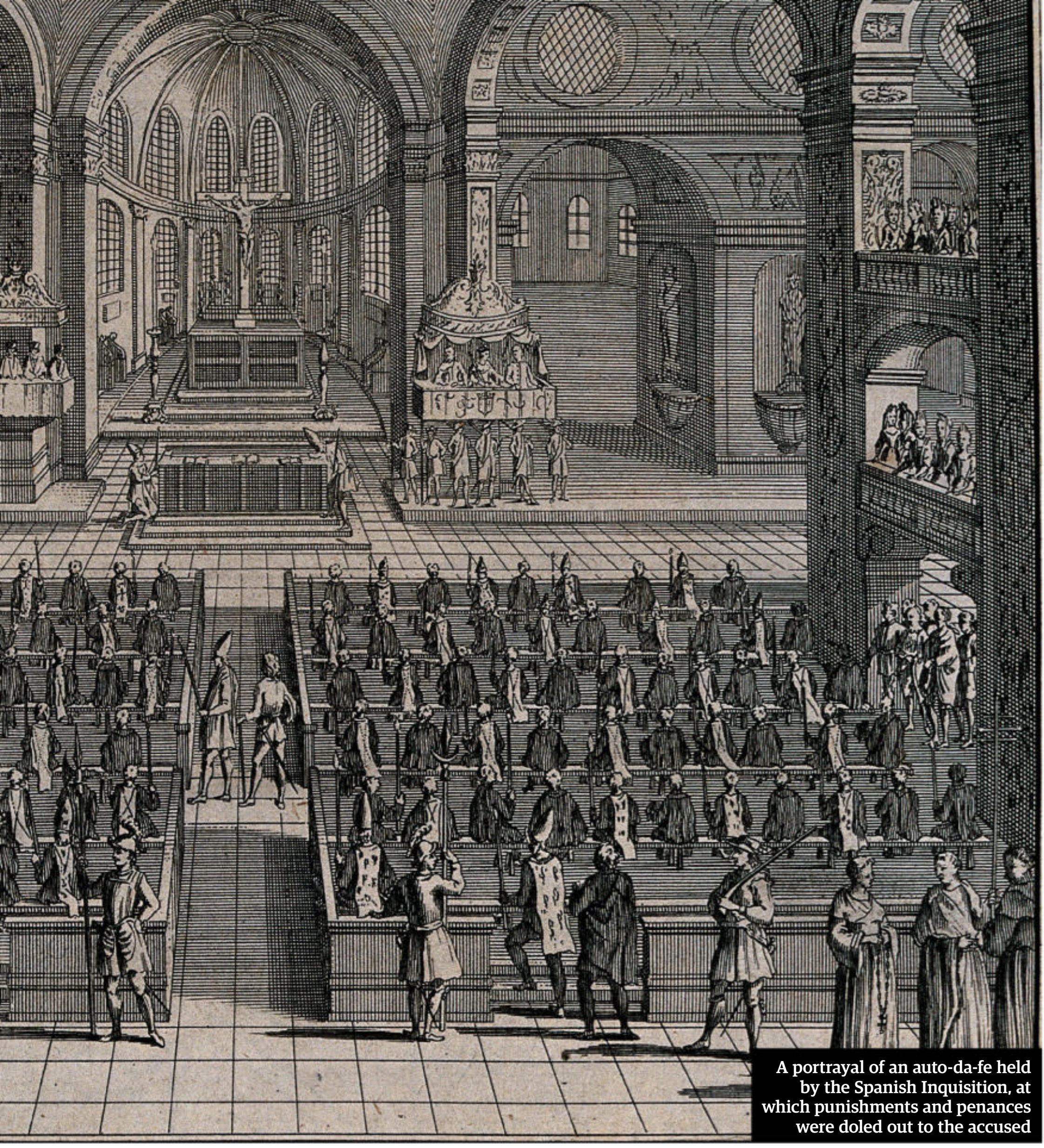
conterens.

S. Magni
1600

The title page of the *Malleus Maleficarum*, the late 15th-century book that set the tone for attitudes towards witchcraft through the Early Modern era



The image of the witches' Sabbath cast a long shadow over Spanish popular and elite culture. Here it is portrayed by Goya



A portrayal of an auto-da-fe held by the Spanish Inquisition, at which punishments and penances were doled out to the accused

a new way of conceptualising witchcraft: it was now seen as a satanically-inspired, highly organised secret sect.

Salazar may not have questioned the possibility of the Devil intervening disastrously in human affairs but, when faced with specific suggestions of witchcraft, he behaved with extraordinary rigour and circumspection. His fellow inquisitors had been convinced of a mass witchcraft epidemic because so many confessions shared the same details. This, however, was precisely what made Salazar suspicious: might it not just as easily signal mass delusion?

Crucially, the reforms and codifications enacted by the Suprema, and inspired by Salazar's reports, had a transformative effect. It was now necessary to corroborate any accusations of witchcraft, and any testimony was to be recorded in its entirety rather than simply being summarised: inconsistencies and contradictions became much easier to spot, as did what Salazar described as "claims that go beyond all human reason."

The Spanish term 'Bruxas' used to describe Satanic witches originated from a Catalan word for nocturnal demons

To his great credit, Salazar also realised that he had played his own part in fanning the flames of paranoia and, for the remainder of his career, he would do much to prevent a repetition of the panic that had engulfed the Basque region. As his reputation blossomed within the Inquisition, he monitored the activities of local tribunals and, on occasion, directly intervened when the secular authorities' zeal reached fever pitch.

Between 1424 and 1782 as many as 60,000 European people were legally put to death for witchcraft, the great majority between the years of 1560 and 1640. Historians have, however, talked of a "Mediterranean mildness" in this context. Spain certainly had its share of persecutions but, by comparison with other parts of Europe, it behaved with relative restraint. The great surprise is that the Spanish Inquisition, for all its notoriety, was one of the key factors in limiting the carnage. One of its agents, Alonso de Salazar y Frías, was a crucial part of this tradition and well deserves his reputation as the "witches' advocate."

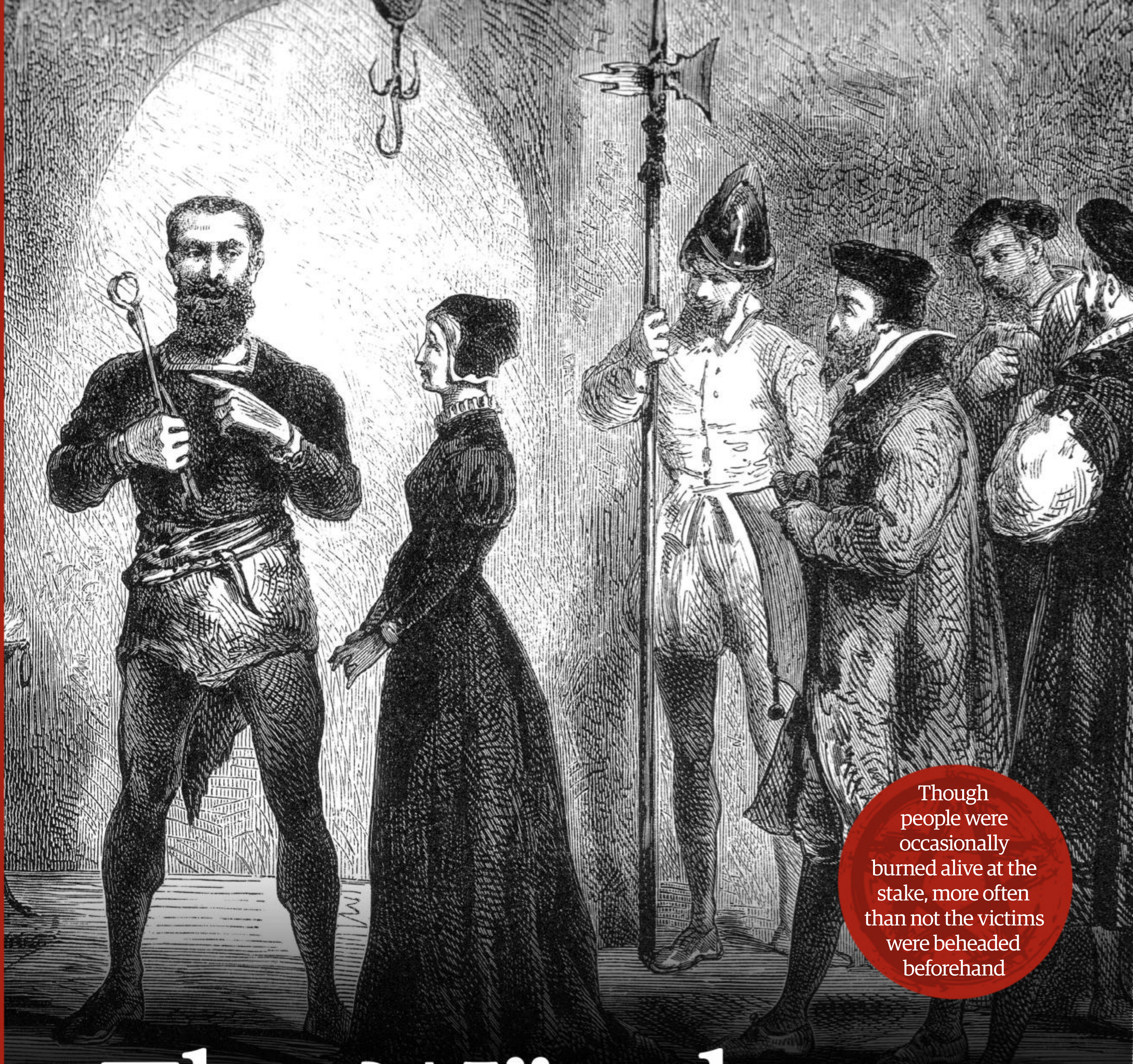
From the Outside Looking In

Another supernatural tall-tale that was met, by turns, with credulity and scepticism concerned the so-called donas de fuera (or "ladies from outside"). The term applied to a race of fairy-like female creatures (often described as strikingly beautiful and possessing animal hands or feet) and the human beings who associated with them. The donas' home was Sicily which, because the island was a Spanish possession at the time, brought them to the attention of the Spanish Inquisition. Again, the Inquisition appears to have been more interested in investigation than overly harsh punishment: between 1579 and 1651, 65 people (including eight men) were accused of involvement. A blend of positive and negative activities was attributed to the accused group. On the one hand, it was suggested that those who offended the donas de fuera might have illness inflicted upon them. On the other hand, those linked to the donas were renowned for their charismatic healing skills and performed other beneficial duties, such as blessing houses, in their close communities.

The existing legal records demonstrate that the donas were much discussed, which suggests that those involved were far from bashful about advertising their supposed gifts. Indeed, the associates of the donas, overwhelmingly made up of old, poor women, secured food and payments for their services, and intimacy with the fairy creatures was widely seen as a privilege: only those with sangre dulce (sweet blood) could expect to be instructed in the wide range of magical practices.

A number of women brought before the Inquisition admitted that they had concocted their stories, and others told of re-enacting supposed encounters with the fairy folk in order to impress potential clients. The notion of night-flying spirits with extraordinary gifts was one of the recurrent themes in the early-modern supernatural world-view and in some places, notably Scotland, a link between fairies and witchcraft was deeply embedded. Fairies at this time were not perceived as the harmless sprites who inhabit the modern popular imagination.

James VI wrote in *Daemonologie* that witches would consort with fairies



Though people were occasionally burned alive at the stake, more often than not the victims were beheaded beforehand

The Würzburg Witch Trials

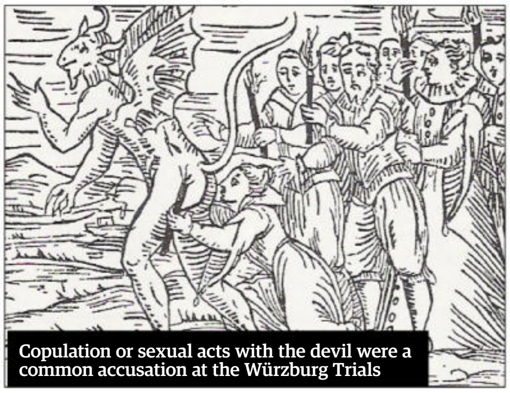
In the early 17th-century Würzburg, Germany became the site of one of the deadliest mass witch trials in history

Picture a witch. To most people, an old, poor, haggard woman jumps to mind; upper classes point their fingers at spinsters and peasants, who stand no chance of asserting their innocence. Although this scenario was common, the Würzburg witch trials turned this on its head. The old and unusual were still accused, but being rich or beautiful was far from a ticket to innocence. The widespread hysteria that gripped the German city from 1626 to 1631 meant that nobody was safe from the accusations, the axe and the flames.

Before the eruption of the infamous witch trial in Würzburg in 1626, there had been a brief period of trials from 1616 to 1617, and then nothing until 1625 when an isolated trial took place. The trials arose in line with the Catholic reconquest of Germany after the destruction of Protestantism in Bohemia. As religious fervour swept a nation gripped by war and famine, and accusations shot up. It was an era where death and disease were commonplace, and people's religious beliefs were tested. This culminated in what can only be described as 'witch fever', and the results were devastating.

The first persecutions in Würzburg occurred under the prince-bishop, Julius Echter von Mespelbrunn, a Jesuit bishop who was eager to spread the message of counter-reformation. His message was so strong that in three years alone, 100,000 people returned to the Catholic church. This spirit of religious zeal would continue under the leadership of his nephew, Philipp Adolf von Ehrenberg, who oversaw the peak of the witch trials and became known as one of the deadliest prince-bishops in European history.

Philipp Adolf leapt on his uncle's legacy and became the instigator for the trials. Over eight years, an estimated 219 people were executed for witchcraft in the city of Würzburg alone, but due to unrecorded deaths the actual number is likely to have been far higher, with an estimated 900 killed in the entire principality. Although plenty of typical victims were accused, the hysteria was so widespread that accusing outcasts alone was not enough to sate the bloodlust. With belief that the Devil was everywhere, people from every walk of life were arrested, including nobles, priests, doctors, even elected officials. Where wealth had acted as a shield against accusations, now any reason a person may stand out was seen as a sign of devilish influence, and many of the richest people were put to death. Beauty, too, was far from a defence, as a 19-year-old girl, described as 'the fairest in the whole city' and seen, for all her life, as modest and pure was executed.


Copulation or sexual acts with the devil were a common accusation at the Würzburg Trials

Names of the executed were not often recorded, and we only have descriptions such as: "The fattest merchant in Würzburg"

Most harrowing of all, children paid a high price in the Würzburg trials, with boys and girls as young as seven put to death. Many of these children were noble children, heirs to wealthy households, and Philipp Adolf even had his own nephew sentenced and killed for witchcraft. These were not single events; multiple children were beheaded or burnt alive by a community who thoroughly believed they had been communing with the Devil. Many of these children were killed for repeating rhymes or charms seen as 'demonic'. In some cases, witch-children were seen as punishment for the sins of the parents, but typically witchcraft was seen as a fault of the children themselves. Authorities were cautioned not to go easy on youths, and that they should be judged solely on their crimes. We often think of witch trials as communities ganging up against outcasts, but at Würzburg mothers and fathers watched their children burn without protest.

Victims were accused of multiple things, and almost any reason at all could be given for an arrest. Often the accusations were associated with the Devil in some way, and reasons for executions varied with accused murder and Satanism to something as harmless as humming a song, apparently seen as singing with the Devil. For the lowest of society, it appeared that no reason was necessary at all, and 32 victims seemed to have been arrested simply for being vagrants. Even passing through Würzburg was enough to cast suspicion, and people were arrested when they weren't able to give a reason for their travel deemed 'satisfactory' by the powers that be.

All the sentences handed down were based almost entirely on confessions obtained under extreme torture. One Jesuit priest, Friedrich Spee, worked as a confessor during the trials and was witness to these tortured confessions, usually obtained from the use of the rack. He was so traumatised by the experience that it apparently turned his hair prematurely white. Spee became massively disillusioned by the experience and believed that all the confessions were worthless, and that every witch condemned by this method was innocent. His thoughts were eventually published in an anti-torture witchcraft text, *Cautio Criminalis,* which became hugely influential to both Catholic and Protestant readers.

After around 900 deaths, countless families torn apart, innocent children killed and lives irrevocably damaged, Philip Adolf died and Würzburg was taken over by King Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden, and the witch trials were put to an end. Würzburg was not alone in its trauma, however, and throughout German towns, thousands of people became victims of a religious devotion, desperation and fear that would not soon be forgotten.

The war was so costly that it bankrupted almost all the countries in it, and the populations paid dearly

Why Did Trials Happen?

It is no coincidence that the Würzburg trials took place under the shadow of the Thirty Years War. This conflict, lasting from 1618 to 1648 was one of the bloodiest in human history, and is today regarded as the most destructive European religious war of all time. Initially beginning as a Protestant versus Catholic struggle, it turned into a grapple for power, sweeping up all the great nations of Europe. With entire regions devastated by famine and disease, fear swept over the continent and ravaged countrysides. With alliances formed, broken and formed again, trust was in short supply and suspicion became a part of daily life.

With Germany suffering arguably the most damage, one can see how a hysteria like the witch trials took root and grew out of control. Times were dark, religious practices were being questioned and people struggled to survive. In as religious a society as Germany was in the 17th century, blaming the Devil and witchcraft made sense, rather than the far more complicated forces of war that were really tearing them apart. It is no accident that witch hunts often emerged in areas most badly hit by famine and disease, where people were quick to suspect supernatural causes. As terrifying as witches were, by holding the trials and killing those suspected, it gave desperate and petrified people some semblance of control, a lie to cling to that themselves and their actions could somehow improve the horrendous conditions that war had brought upon them.

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Salem Witch Trials

The real story behind the Crucible

22 September 1692

The air crackled with tension as the people of Salem, Massachusetts, gathered on Gallows Hill to witness the latest round of justice. The eight men and women who had been brought by cart were neighbours, even friends and family – but this only made their betrayal sharper. For those eight – Martha Corey, Alice Parker, Mary Parker, Margaret Scott, Mary Eastey, Ann Pudeator, Wilmot Redd and Samuel Wardwell Sr – were all guilty of the most hideous and unforgivable of sins in God's eyes: witchcraft.

> The people of Salem were wholly convinced that the devil was real, allowing for the accusations to be taken seriously against so many

There was no doubt of their guilt. The cart that had carried the condemned on their final journey had been beset with difficulties – the devil's work, the people had muttered, but even the devil could not save his own now. Martha Corey prayed most earnestly before she was turned off into oblivion, and Mary Eastey's moving farewell to those that she would leave behind caused many tears from those who listened before the rope was set about her neck. But many others remained unmoved – these "Firebrands of Hell", as one observer called them, were getting no less than they deserved.

Mercifully, although the gathered group did not yet know it, this would be the last time their beleaguered community would witness the death of a witch on the gallows. There must have been many there that day, accuser and accused alike, who wondered how they had come to this.

It all began in Salem Village in January of that year when 11-year-old Abigail Williams and her cousin nine-year-old Betty Parris fell ill. Children sickened all the time, but this was no ordinary illness. The girls suffered from fits so terrible that it made others weep to watch them: at times they were struck dumb, at others they seemed to be choked of their very breath by an invisible force. As if that were not bad enough, they complained of being pinched

A Village Torn Apart

There wasn't a soul in Salem not affected by the witch trials

Mary Whittredge

Mary Green, escaped

Roger Toothaker, died before trial probably due to torture or maltreatment

Hannah Tyler

William Barker, Sr.

Job Tookey

Lydia Dustin, found not guilty but died in custody

Edward Farrington

Nehemiah Abbot, Jr.

William Barker, Jr.

Mary Marston

Sarah Bishop

Sarah Osborne, died in prison before she could be tried

Arthur Abbot

Mary Barker

Abigail Rowe

Rev. Francis Dane, minister in Andover, Massachusetts

Abigail Barker

Sarah Cloyce, sister of Rebecca Nurse and Mary Eastey

Margaret Prince

Edward Bishop

Sarah Rist

John Porter Sr.

Rachel Clinton

Sarah Swift

John Bradstreet

Bethiah Carter Sr.

Giles Corey pressed to death

Edward Bishop III

Stephen Johnson

Katerina Biss

Elizabeth Dicer

Mary Bridges, Sr.

Thomas Carrier, Jr.

Rev. John Busse, minister in Wells, Maine

William Proctor

Bethiah Carter Jr.

Mary Bridges, Jr.

Sarah Buckley

Mercy Wardwell

Tituba

Rebecca Dike

Sarah Carrier

Sarah Bridges

Phoebe Day

Dorothy Faulkner

Mehitable Downing

Sarah Cole

Dudley Bradstreet

Sarah Dustin

Thomas Farrer, Sr., spent 7 months in Boston jail before being released

Edward Farrington, escaped

Margaret Jacobs

Daniel and Lydia Eames

Eunice Frye

Rachel Vinson

Anne Bradstreet

Sarah Hawkes, Jr.

Esther Elwell

Sarah Hale, wife of Rev. John Hale, minister in Beverly, Massachusetts

John Alden, Jr.

Margaret Prince

Rebecca Jacobs

Hezekiah Usher II

Israel Porter

George Jacobs, Jr.

Elizabeth Johnson, Sr.

Abigail Rowe

Mary Tyler

James Howe, husband of Elizabeth Howe

Daniel Andrew

Thomas Carrier, Jr.

William Barker, Sr.

Ann Foster

Hannah Post

Mary Lacey, Jr.,daughter of Mary Lacey, Sr. and granddaughter of Ann Foster

Edward Wooland

Abigail Faulkner, Jr.

Mary Rowe

Elizabeth Dicer

Susannah Post

Mary Toothaker, wife of Roger Toothaker and sister of Martha Carrier

Joan Penney

Frances Hutchins

Mary Rowe

Sarah Carrier

Dorothy Good, daughter of Sarah Good

Mary and Philip English

Susanna Rootes, either released or found not guilty

Sarah Wilson

Mary Black, slave who was arrested and indicted but never went to trial

Lady Mary Phips, wife of Massachusetts Governor Sir William Phips

Elizabeth Hutchinson Hart, released after 7 months in jail after her son Thomas filed petitions on her behalf

Mercy, daughter of Sarah Good, born and died in prison some time prior to her mother's execution.

Margaret Sheaf Thacher, Jonathan Corwin's mother-in-law

Abigail Faulkner, Sr, who was pregnant, pardoned

Mary Lacey Sr., pled guilty and pardoned

† Bridget Bishop

Mary Bradbury, escaped

† Rebecca Nurse

† Susannah Martin

† Elizabeth Howe

† Sarah Wildes

† Rev. George Burroughs

† Martha Carrier

† George Jacobs, Sr.

† John Proctor

† Martha Corey

Sarah Wardwell, "confessed" and pardoned

† John Willard

† Alice Parker

† Mary Eastey

† Mary Parker

Ann Foster, died in custody

† Ann Pudeator

† Margaret Scott

† Sarah Good

Elizabeth Proctor, who was pregnant, pardoned

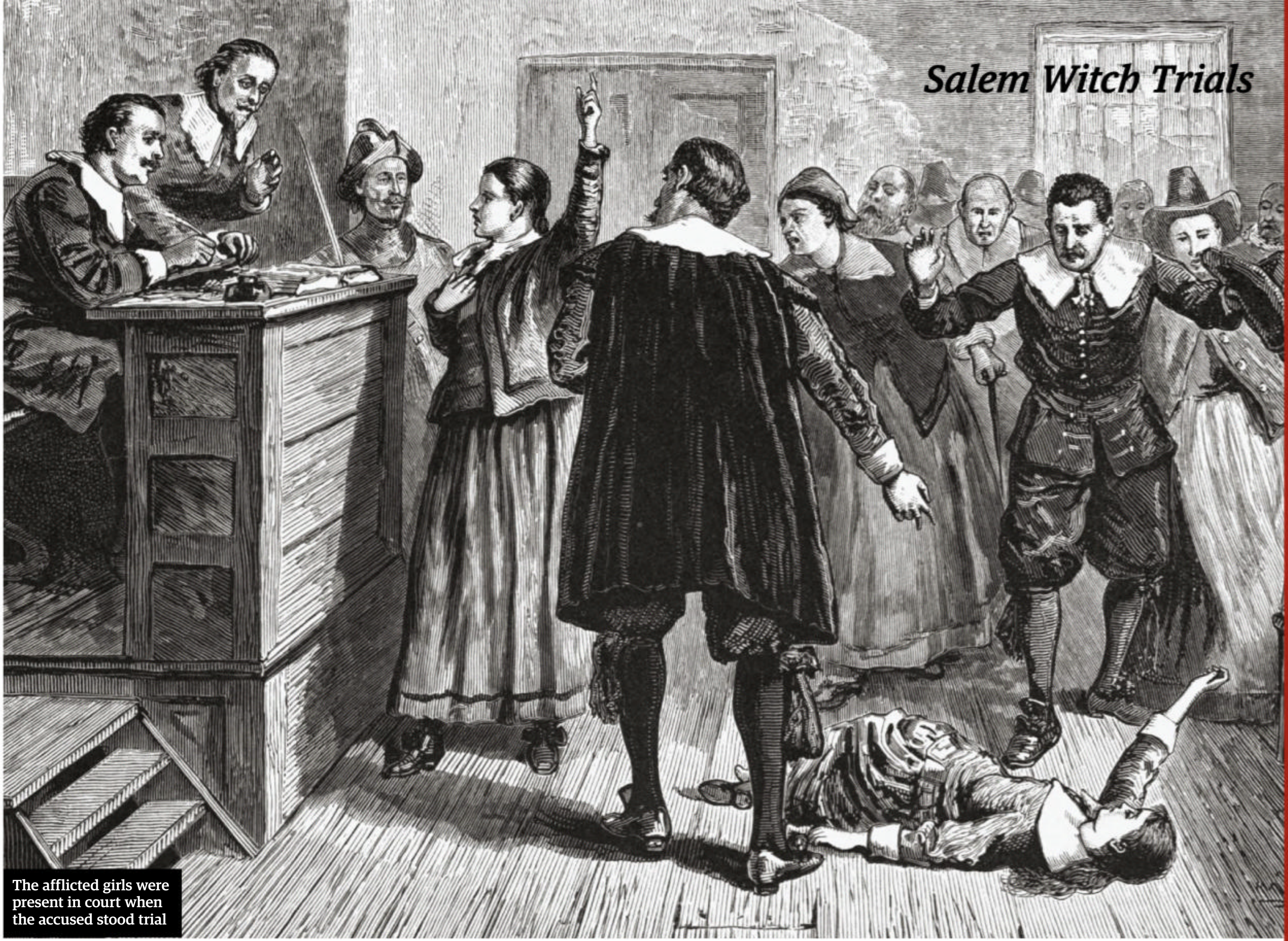
† Samuel Wardwell, Sr.

† Wilmot Redd

Dorcas Hoar, "confessed" and pardoned

Elizabeth Booth (aged 18)
Elizabeth Hubbard (aged 17)
Mercy Lewis (aged 17)
Elizabeth "Betty" Parris (aged 9)
Ann Putnam, Jr. (aged 12)
Margaret Rule (age unknown)
Susannah Sheldon (aged 18)
Mercy Short (aged 15)
Martha Sprague (aged 16)
Mary Walcott (aged 17)
Mary Warren (aged 20)
Abigail Williams (aged 11)

⬜ Afflicted 🟥 Convicted († Hanged) 🟨 Accused



The afflicted girls were present in court when the accused stood trial

and pricked, their bodies pulled and twisted about against their will.

In desperation, the Reverend Samuel Parris, Betty's father, sought medical help. Far from offering hope, however, the doctor's verdict was grave indeed. The girls were not stricken by any ordinary illness. Their suffering was the work of the devil and his cohorts – they had been bewitched.

While the family reeled from this pronouncement, two other girls from Salem Village, Ann Putnam Junior and Elizabeth Hubbard, started to display the same symptoms as their friends. As local residents debated this alarming development, neighbour Mary Sibley took matters into her own hands. She instructed Tituba, the Parris's Native slave, to prepare a 'witch cake'. Rye and the urine of the afflicted girls was mixed together and baked: the 'cake' was then fed to the family dog, which was carefully watched for signs that would undeniably confirm the cause of the girls' suffering. Carried out no doubt in good faith, Tituba would come to regret her part in the matter, as once the cake was consumed, the girls cried out that Tituba herself had been the one to bewitch them.

When Reverend Parris discovered what had been done, he was horrified: counter-magic such as this was no better than the very evil they were trying to battle, and to make matters worse, the finger had been pointed at his own servant. When questioned, Tituba denied being a witch or harming the girls, but it was too late. The girls continued to insist that she was responsible, and also named Salem women Sarah Good and Sarah Osborne as Tituba's accomplices.

After being formally complained against, the three women were examined by John Hathorne in the local meetinghouse – the largest building in Salem Village. The room was packed as neighbours came to hear what the witches would say. The women were by turns frightened, eloquent and defiant. Sarah Good had done nothing, she said, but the blame could be placed firmly at Sarah Osborne's door. Osborne likewise denied her guilt, pointing out that she was not to blame if the devil chose to use a spirit in her image to do his mischief. Then it was Tituba's turn. She confessed to a stunned room that she was after all guilty of causing harm to the girls through malefic magic.

> Dorothy, or Dorcas, Good, whose testimony convicted her own mother, was only four years old when she confessed to being a witch

Could You be a Witch?

Tick the boxes that apply to you – if you mark three or more, it's very likely that you're under Satan's spell

- I am over the age of 50 ☐
- I am unmarried ☐
- I am widowed ☐
- I am married ☐
- I have moles ☐
- I talk a lot ☐
- I dress provocatively ☐
- I own a cat ☐
- I have defended someone already accused ☐
- I am in a dispute with an influential member of the community ☐
- I argue with my husband ☐
- I am rich ☐
- I am poor ☐
- I don't go to church ☐

Why Did it Happen?

Here are some of the top theories put forward to explain the outbreak of accusations

Hand of God

The people of Salem believed that the trials were punishment for not following the will of God. They had sinned, and because of their "inordinate love of the world", God had let the devil trick them into accusing and executing their neighbours.

Fraud

A popular and early theory, the girls were, quite simply, faking it. They wanted attention and saw their "fits" and other torments as a way to get this, bringing them the status that they craved.

Acid Trip

It has been suggested that the symptoms displayed by the girls were actually caused by ergotism or rye poisoning. The afflicted villagers had eaten bread made from the infected rye, leading to the alarming fits and convulsions.

Indian Scare

The Second Indian War overlapped with the Salem trials and the fear of the witch within may have stemmed from fear of Indian attack on the frontiers. Several of the girls who made accusations at Salem were refugees from areas affected by the fighting.

Hysteria

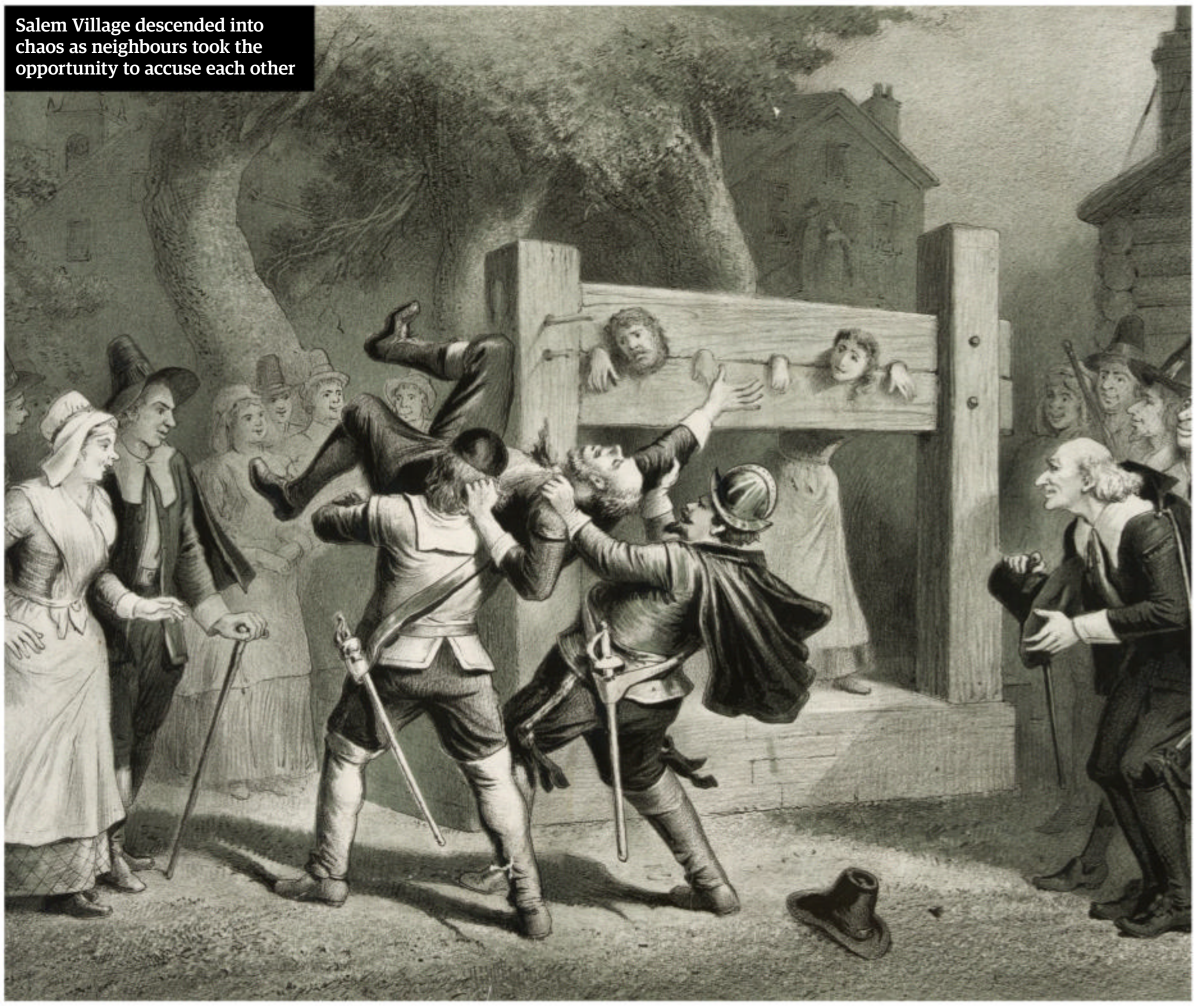
The girls may have been genuinely experiencing hysteria: suffering hormonal and biological changes due to their age and living through a time of great upheaval, their fits were an involuntary display of the stresses placed upon their minds and bodies.

Biological Pathogen

Illness of a physical kind may have been responsible after all. It has been highlighted that the animals of Salem likewise experienced the same bizarre symptoms as the girls, and that these fitted with those of epidemic encephalitis.

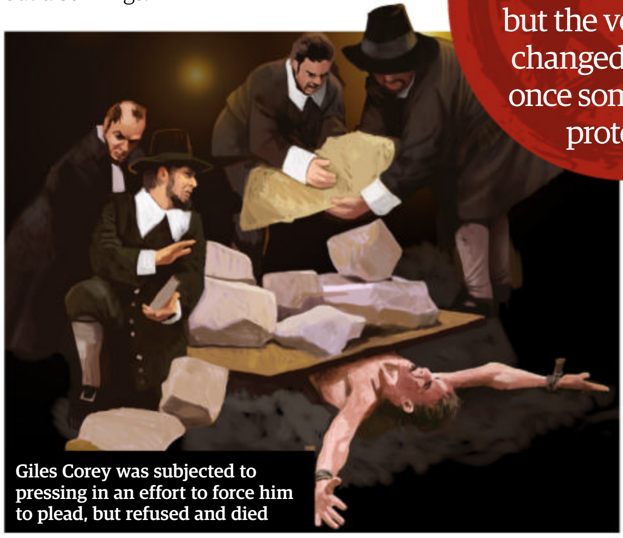
Misogyny and Repression

Women with control of property considered beyond the norm were over-represented in those accused and executed at Salem. These "independent" women were seen as a threat to the established patriarchy and therefore needed to be removed.



Salem Village descended into chaos as neighbours took the opportunity to accuse each other

She had not wanted to harm the girls, Tituba insisted to the gathered crowd of neighbours, it had been only at the behest of Sarah Good and Sarah Osborne that she had done so. She described in very great detail the familiar spirits that her associates used to do their terrible deeds. Sarah Good had a yellow bird that sucked her between her fingers, and Sarah Osborne had two spirit helpers - one a strange hairy creature, and the other that had a woman's head and legs, but also wings.



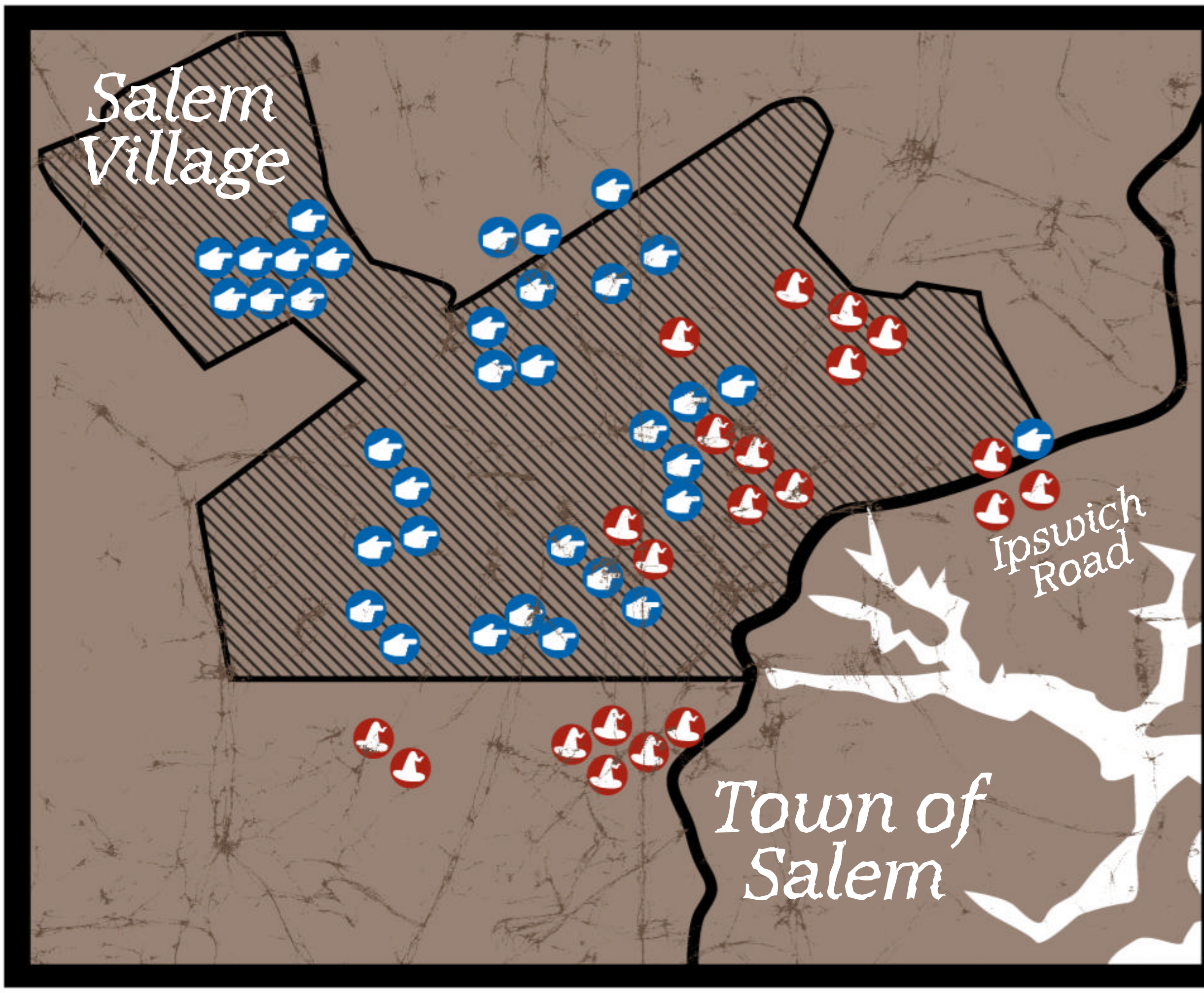
Giles Corey was subjected to pressing in an effort to force him to plead, but refused and died

Rebecca Nurse was actually found innocent by the jury, but the verdict was changed to guilty once some people protested

The afflicted girls, present in the room and making a display of their sufferings, fell silent as Tituba spoke. It was a brief respite, however, and they began to suffer afresh as she finished. This was, Tituba announced, Sarah Good's fault, and the wailing girls agreed. The session descended into chaos, leaving the good people of Salem with much to talk about as they left for their homes.

Over the next few weeks, the girls continued to suffer. Worse, more came forward with the same terrifying symptoms, and others including Martha Corey, Dorothy, or Dorcas, Good (the four-year-old daughter of Sarah Good) and the elderly Rebecca Nurse were accused and arrested. Tituba confessed further, saying that she had signed the devil's book with her own blood, and that she had seen the signatures of Sarah Good and Sarah Osborne there too. Throughout March and April, the terrified community turned on itself - accusations and arrests snowballing in a vain attempt to rid themselves of the curse that seemed to be upon them.

Into this confusion came Sir William Phips, the newly appointed governor of Massachusetts. Arriving on 14 May, he found to his horror the province in utter chaos, with no less than 38 people imprisoned on suspicion

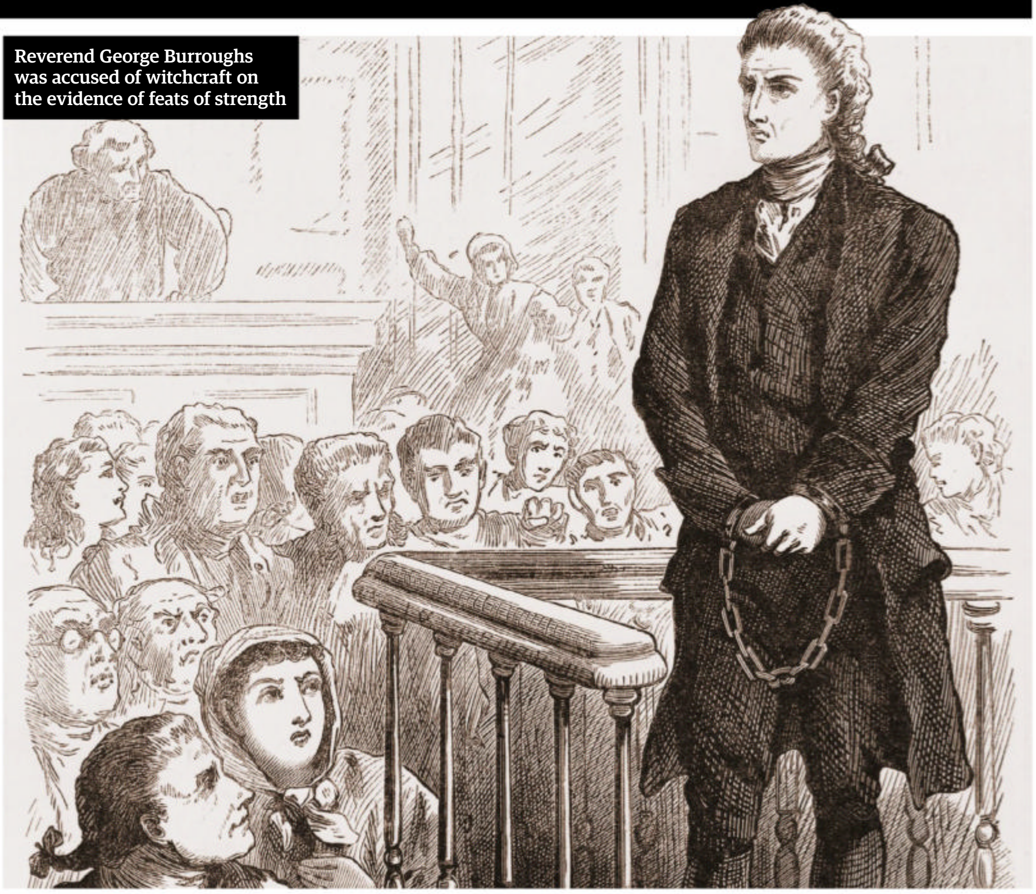


Did Rivalry Between Old and New Set the Stage For Accusations?

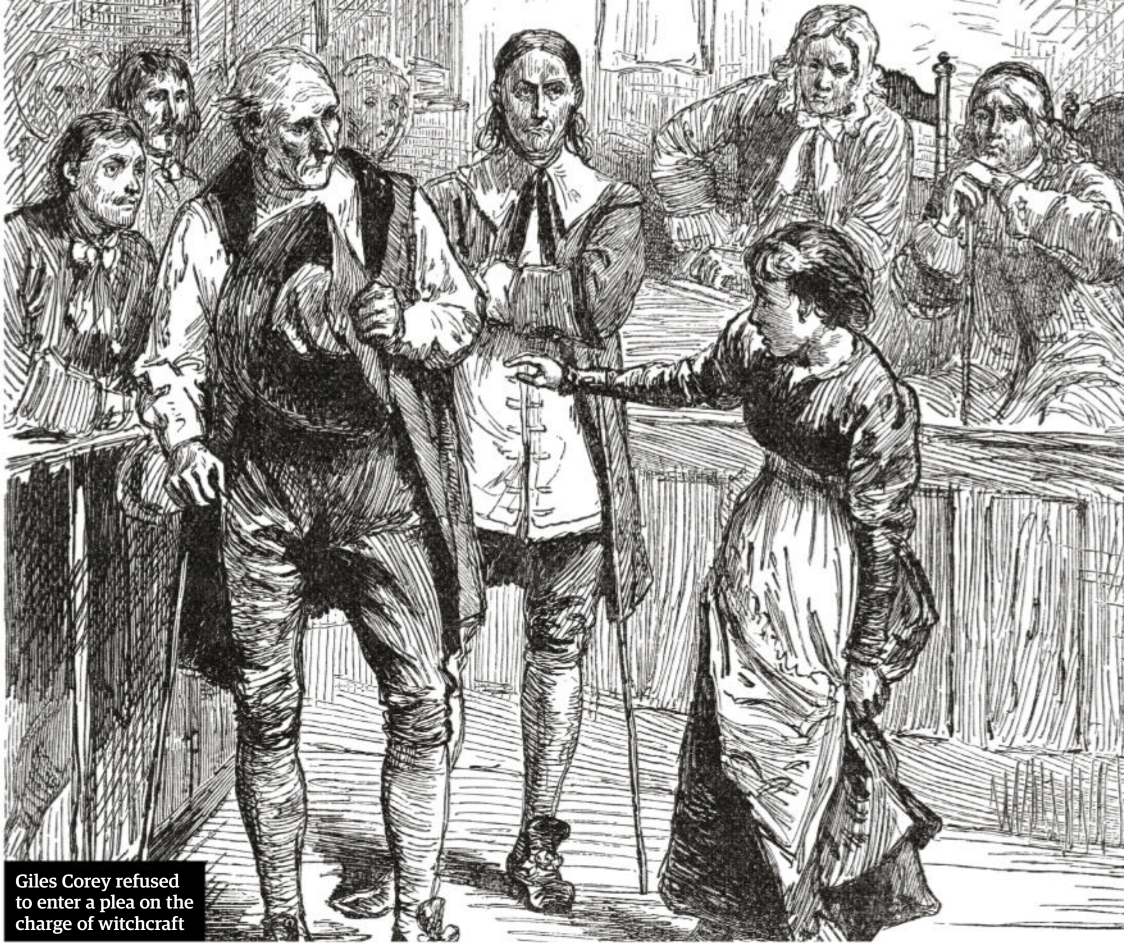
At the time of the trials, Salem was divided into Salem Village – populated by farmsteads and families with traditional values – and Salem Town, where a new, entrepreneurial class had been slowly growing for the last two decades. With clear tension between the less well-off traditional farmers on the one hand and the innkeepers, tradesmen, and more market-savvy farmers on the other, it is noteworthy that the first accusations came from the interior of the Village, while the accused were from the outskirts nearest the Town. Were the trials a result of the beleaguered traditionalists striking back against the encroachment of capitalism?

of witchcraft. With his reputation and job on the line, Phips wasted no time in establishing a court of Oyer and Terminer – meaning to hear and determine – with nine judges appointed to hear proceedings against the accused. The news must have filled the people of Salem with satisfaction and relief: the troublemakers would now get what they deserved. Far from lessening, however, accusations continued apace and further arrests were made. By the time the court finally convened just over two weeks later on 2 June in Salem Town, there were 62 people held in custody.

Bridget Bishop was the first to come before the judges. Like any prisoner of the time, she was already at a disadvantage: conviction was the outcome more often than not once a case reached trial. But Bridget Bishop had more reason than most to fear this particular court. This was not the first time the three-times-married woman had been accused of witchcraft. Her second husband, Thomas Oliver, had accused her when he was alive, and there was talk by some that she had murdered at least one husband by witchcraft. Although she had once escaped the noose, the evidence given by the girls of Salem against Bridget was damning indeed. She had come to them in ghostly form,



Reverend George Burroughs was accused of witchcraft on the evidence of feats of strength



Giles Corey refused to enter a plea on the charge of witchcraft

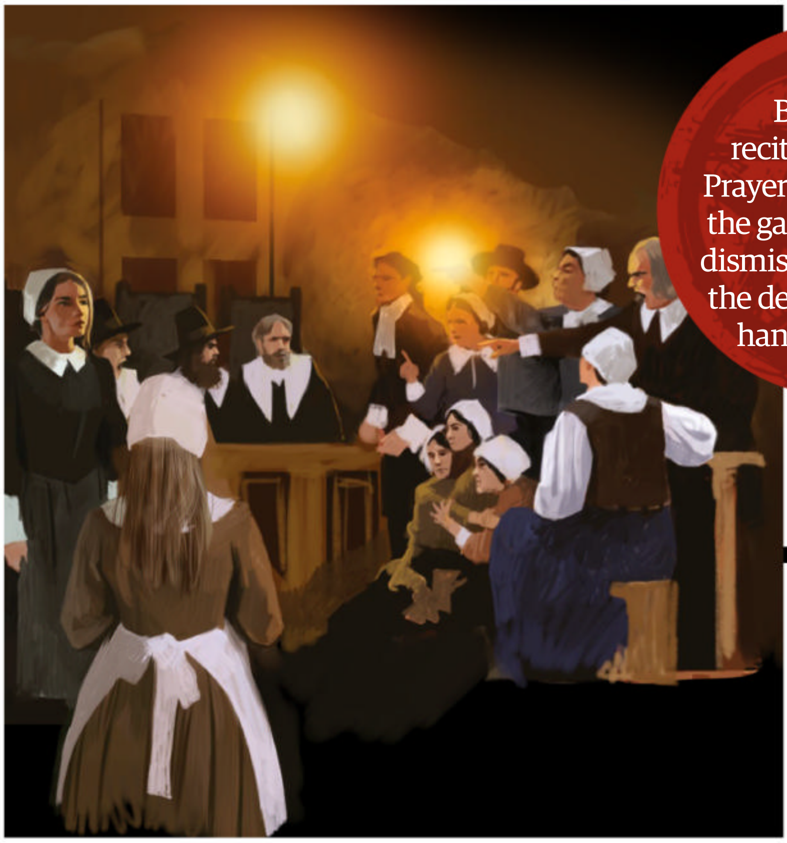
they said, tormenting them physically with pinches and prods, even threatening to drown one of the girls when she would not sign her name in the devil's book for her.

In front of the packed room, people witnessed with their own eyes Bishop's guilt. If the accused woman so much as glanced at the girls, they fell into fits, wailing and writhing piteously for all to see. If that wasn't enough, someone declared that Bishop's spectral form had torn her coat - and when the coat was examined, there was indeed a tear just as stated. In her defence, Bishop swore she had never seen the girls before in her life and that she was innocent, but to no avail. The indictments against her were upheld and she was found guilty, going to the gallows on 10 June as the Salem witchcraft trials claimed their first victim.

There was a temporary lull in the madness then as the court adjourned to seek advice from the area's most prominent ministers. Cotton Mather, whose name will always be linked with the tragedy of Salem, wrote the collective response. It at first seemed rather measured, urging that "a very critical and exquisite caution" should be taken where evidence was concerned in case the devil was actually playing tricks and making fools of them all, especially if the person accused was of formerly good reputation. This urge to caution was almost entirely negated, however, by the opening and closing points of the letter. The afflictions suffered by the tormented girls were, the ministers were certain, deplorable and must be stopped at all costs: in their own words they could not "but humbly recommend unto the government the speedy and vigorous prosecution of such as have rendered themselves obnoxious, according to the direction given in the laws of God, and then wholesome statutes of the English nation, for the detection of witchcrafts."

With this endorsement, and despite the resignation of Nathaniel Saltonstall from the court in disgust at Bishop's execution, the court reconvened at the end of June. The judges were not slow to continue the work they had started: Sarah Good, Elizabeth Howe, Susannah Martin, Sarah Wildes and the elderly Rebecca Nurse were brought to trial and, declared guilty, hanged just under three weeks later. Six more were found guilty and sentenced to the same fate on 5 August: only one, Elizabeth Proctor, escaped the noose on the 19th - her execution was postponed because she was pregnant. Like those that had gone before them, their bodies were buried between the rocks: excommunicated and cast out from the church that regulated the lives of the whole community, they were denied a proper burial, left in their shallow graves for the birds and the elements unless their grieving families could retrieve them under cover of darkness.

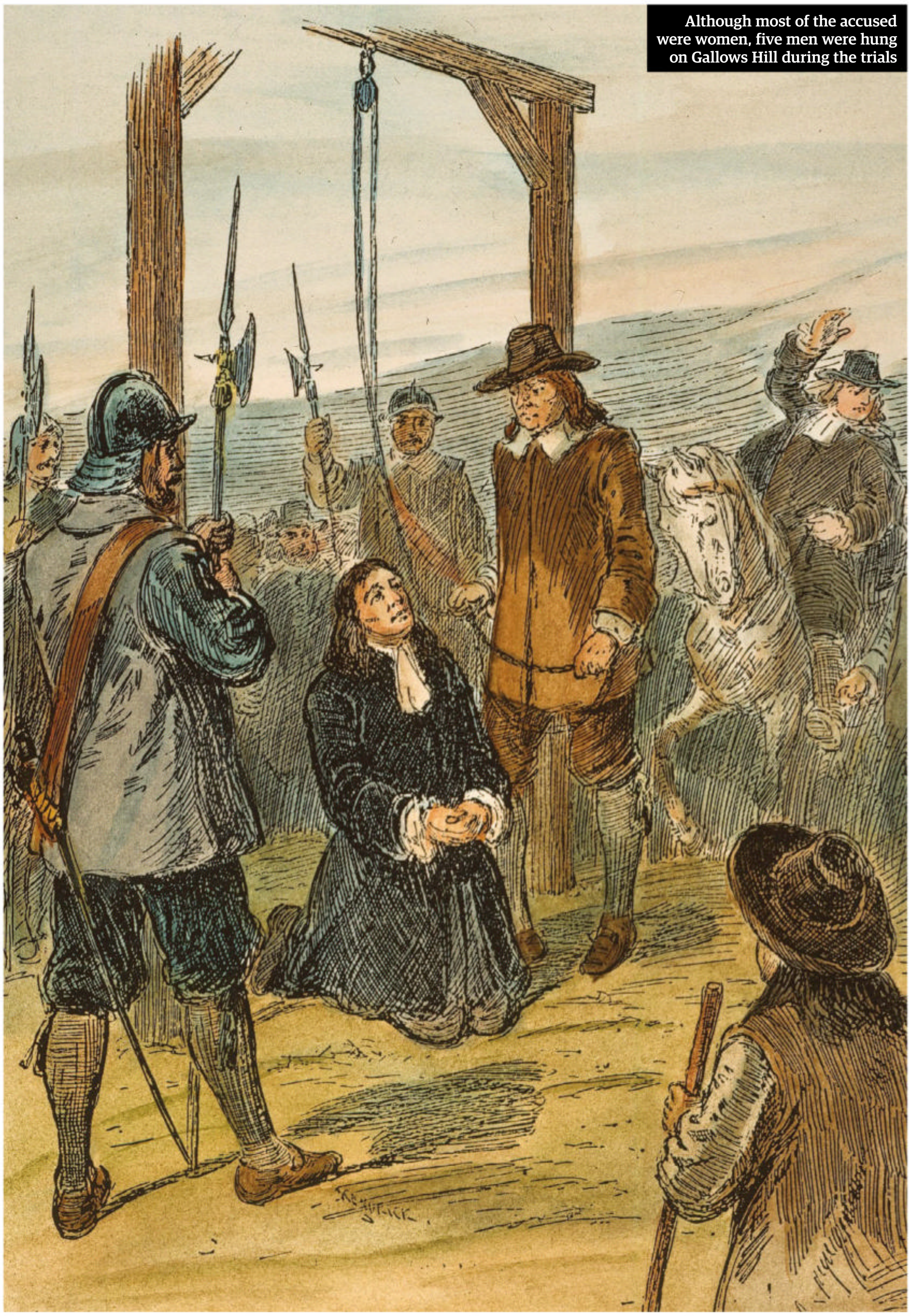
It must have seemed to the people of Salem that they would never be free from the curse set upon them: however vigilantly they tried to root out the devil's evil, more and more witches were uncovered



George Burroughs recited the Lord's Prayer perfectly from the gallows: this was dismissed as a trick of the devil and he was hanged anyway

Timeline: Events moved with startling speed during the Salem trials

- **January - mid-February 1692**
  Cousins Abigail Williams and Betty Parris fall victim to a strange illness. They are diagnosed by a local doctor as being bewitched, and a witch cake is made to confirm this theory.
- **March**
  Accused by the girls, Sarah Good, Sarah Osborne and Tituba are arrested and questioned before a packed meetinghouse. Tituba confesses to harming the girls under duress by the other two.
- **April**
  More Salem residents are named as doing the devil's work and arrested as witchcraft fears spread. Reverend George Burroughs, the former minister for Salem, is accused by the girls.



Although most of the accused were women, five men were hung on Gallows Hill during the trials

7 (Exceptionally Reliable) Tests

Spotting a witch could be tricky: luckily, the following tests could help decide if a suspect was innocent or guilty

Spectral evidence

1 Victims of witchcraft often spoke of being tormented by the apparition of the accused witch, even if the actual person was elsewhere at the time. Whether to allow the admission of this form of evidence was hotly debated during the Salem trials.

Witch's touch

2 One of the simplest but most dramatic of tests to witness: the accused party was invited to touch the victim – if they fell into fits and convulsions, then this was proof that the accused was guilty of bewitching them.

Eyewitness account

3 If someone came forward to say they had seen the accused carrying out acts of witchcraft, this could be all the evidence needed – especially if the witness was of good reputation and the suspected witch was not.

Lord's Prayer

4 Every good Puritan was expected to be able to say the Lord's Prayer. Getting it wrong when tested was a sure sign that the suspect was guilty and working with the devil, and fear or sleep deprivation were no excuse for flubbing your words.

Swimming

5 The suspected witch had their thumbs and toes bound together before being lowered into the water. Sinking meant innocence (and the accused being quickly pulled out), but if they floated, they were found guilty and liable to be condemned.

Witch's teats

6 Searching a witch's body could reveal teats from which the witch fed her familiar spirits or the devil himself. These were often in "hidden" places, such as the armpit, under the breasts or in between the legs.

Witch cake

7 Made of rye mixed with urine, the 'cake' was baked then fed to a dog. If the dog acted strangely, it was proof that the suffering person had been bewitched. Not, as sometimes believed, to identify the witch themselves.

May
George Burroughs is arrested and Sarah Osborne dies in prison. The newly arrived Governor William Phips orders a court of Oyer and Terminer to be established to try accusations of witchcraft.

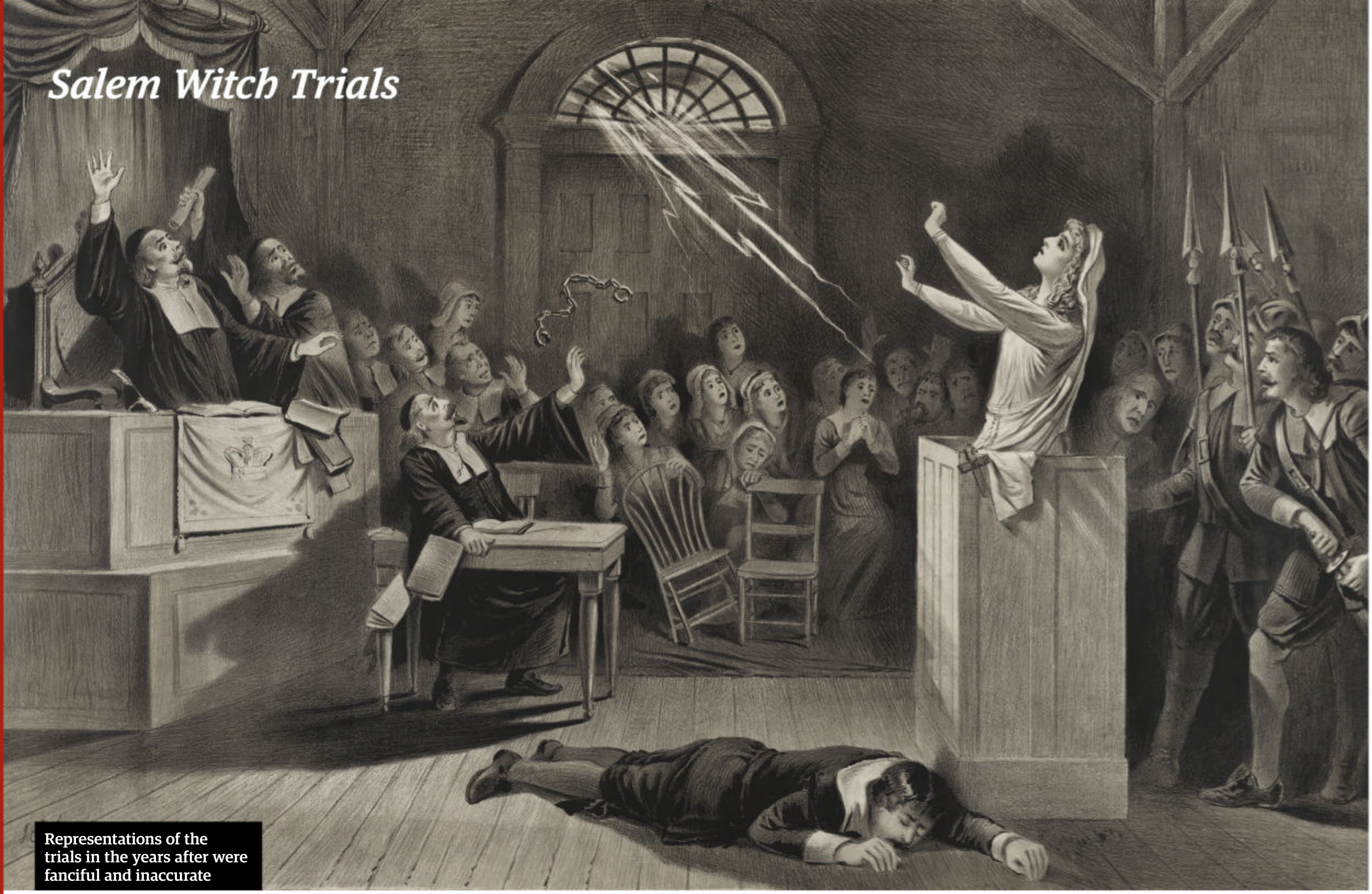
June
The court of Oyer and Terminer convenes for the first time, with Bridget Bishop the first accused of witchcraft to be seen before the judges. Found guilty at trial, she is hanged at Gallows Hill.

July
Sarah Good, Elizabeth Howe, Susannah Martin, Sarah Wildes and 71-year-old Rebecca Nurse are executed by hanging at Gallows Hill after being tried and found guilty of witchcraft.

August
Six more Salem Village residents are condemned to hang as the young girls continue to suffer. Five die on the gallows, however, Elizabeth Proctor escapes the noose due to pregnancy.

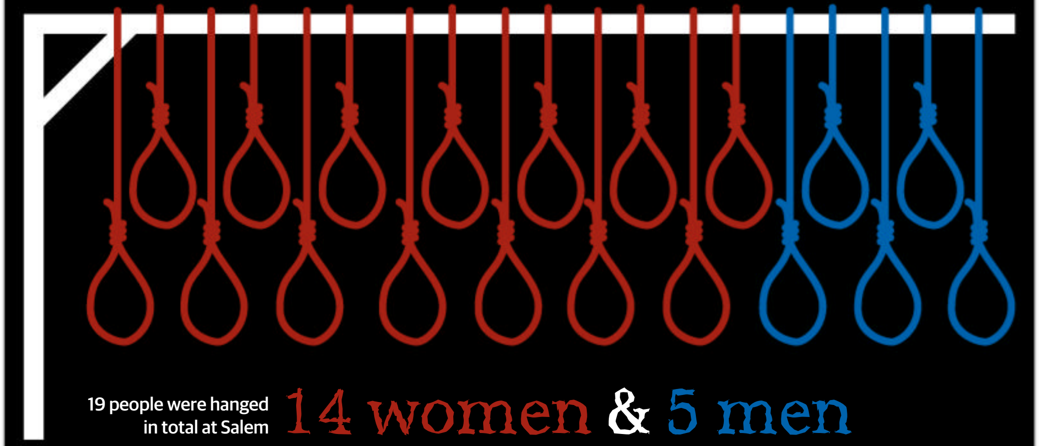
September
More executions take place. Giles Corey is pressed to death after refusing to plea either guilty or innocent. Towards the end of the month, the last executions take place on Gallows Hill.

January – May 1693
The new Superior Court of Judicature convenes to try those who remain in the prisons. Charges are dismissed or the accused found not guilty in all but five cases, which are pardoned by the governor.



Representations of the trials in the years after were fanciful and inaccurate

The Trials in Numbers

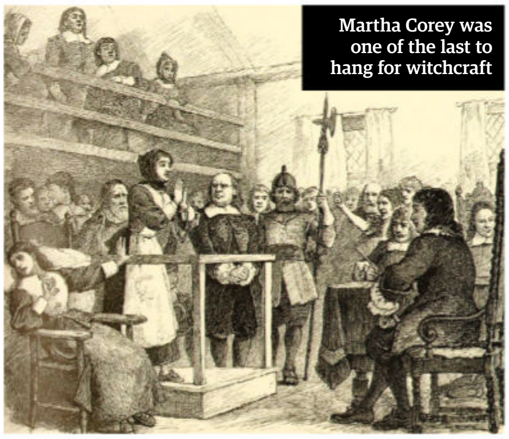


19 people were hanged in total at Salem **14 women & 5 men**

12 people had been convicted and executed for witchcraft in New England before 1692

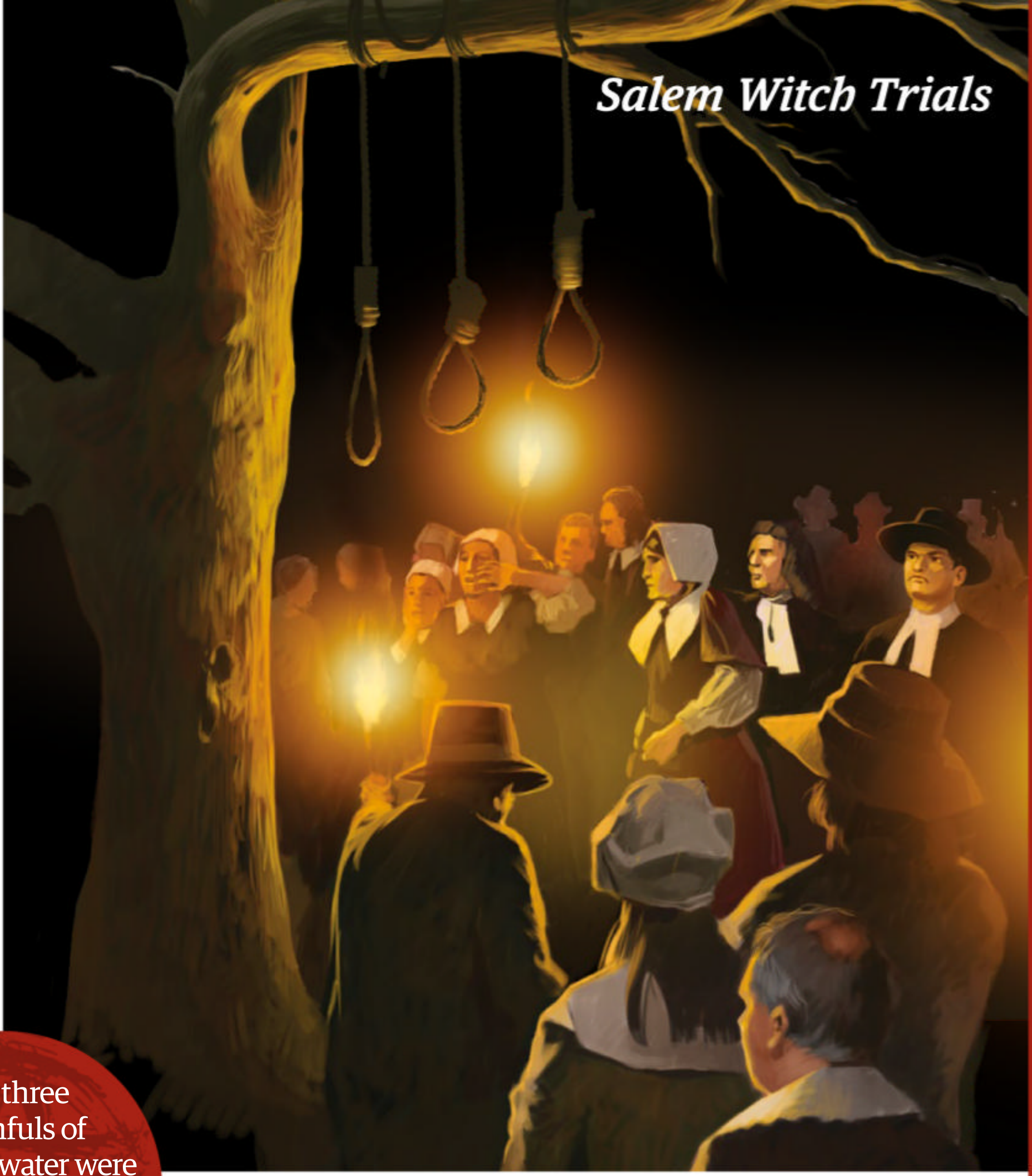
54 people confessed to witchcraft during the Salem trials

132 of the accused were women



Martha Corey was one of the last to hang for witchcraft

to take their places. Things were no better as September came round. 18 more witches were indicted with nine found guilty and sentenced to hang on the 17th of that month. One of those tried, however, 81-year-old Giles Corey, refused to plead either guilty or not guilty to the charges brought against him. He had been accused by the girls back in April, and had languished in prison ever since waiting trial. Although many came forward to give evidence against him, no words could convince the man to submit a plea either way. By law he was therefore sentenced to death by the process of peine forte et dure - hard punishment - where the condemned endured heavy stones placed upon his chest until they finally crushed him. Corey remained steadfast in his refusal to speak and died two days later without confessing to guilt or innocence.



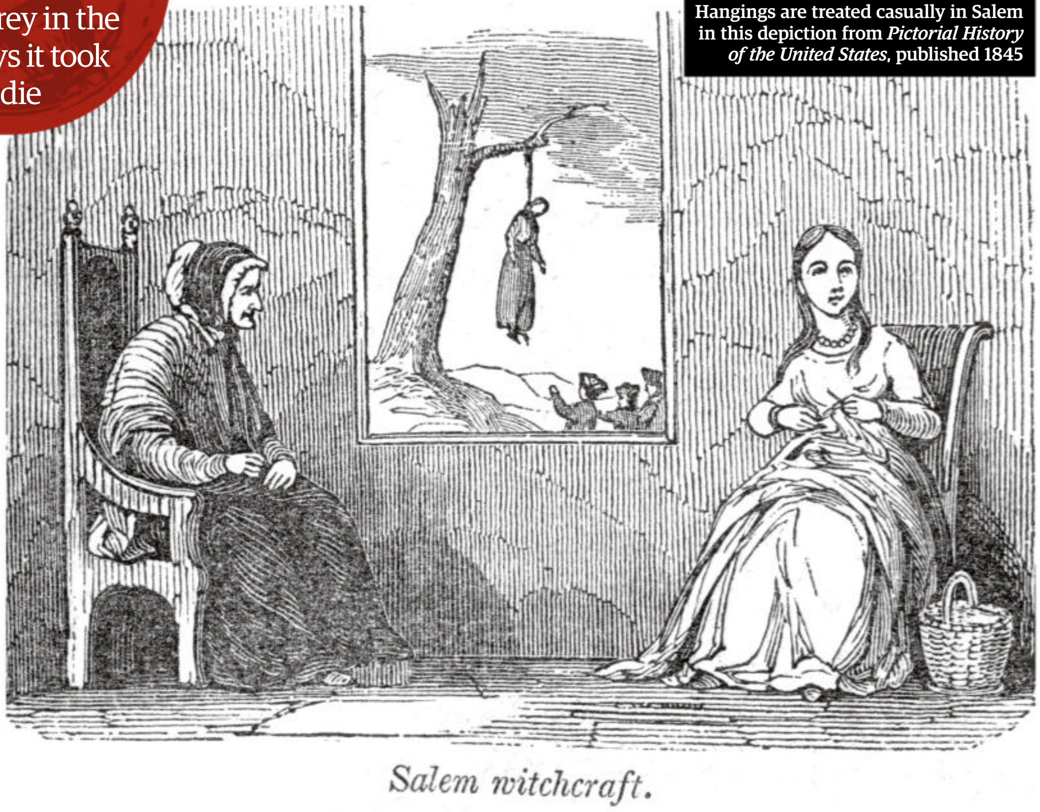
It was thus that the people of Salem gathered on 22 September to witness what would be the final executions in this sorry tale. Although too late to save the eight final victims, as October came around, dissenting voices began to grow louder. Among those speaking out against the trials, Reverend Increase Mather argued against the acceptance of spectral evidence, so popular in the Salem trials, in court. Governor Phips, perhaps in part swayed by the fact that his own wife, Lady Mary Phips, had recently been accused, reconsidered matters and in October sent his recommendations to London that the trials be stopped. While he waited for a reply, further arrests were ceased, and the court of Oyer and Terminer that had sentenced so many to death was dissolved.

A new court was convened in January of 1693, with William Stoughton, a man who had been instrumental in the earlier condemnations, at the helm. The task of the new court was clear: to pardon and release as many of those left in the prisons as possible. Out of the cases that followed in the next few months, most were found innocent. Three were not so lucky; they were found guilty and sentenced to follow their predecessors to Gallows Hill. Fate intervened in the form of Governor Phips: his distaste for the whole matter evident now, he overrode a furious Stoughton, pardoning not only the three condemned but also acquitting all those who still remained in the prisons. And so it was over. The Salem witchcraft madness was spent.

Tituba, the slave who had been there from the start, was one of the last to be released. Imprisoned for more than a year, she was no doubt in a sorry state indeed when she finally saw the light of day again. Her ultimate fate is unknown: her old owner, Reverend Parris, refused to pay her prison costs and she was sold to someone who would foot the bill.

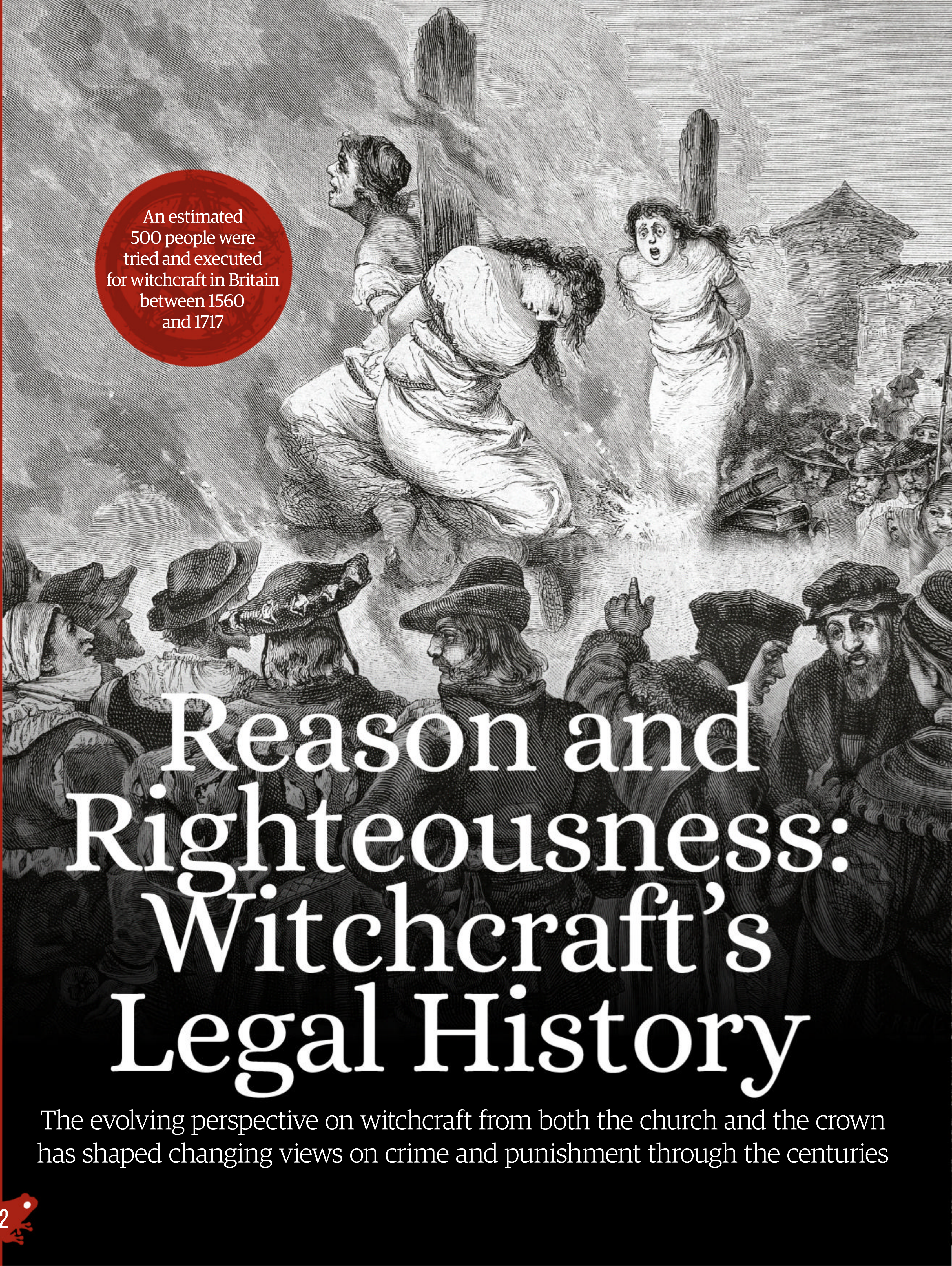
Slowly, painfully slowly, the shattered Salem community tried to make sense of what had happened and rebuild itself. Of those involved, some proved remorseful, while others maintained that only justice had been carried out. In January 1697, a fast day was held: the apology of Samuel Sewell was read aloud, and a dozen others who had sat on the jury pleaded for forgiveness. Petitions were made across the decades that followed for all who had been executed to be pardoned, but it was not until 2001, more than 300 years since the events took place, that all were at long last proclaimed innocent. Whether or not they rest in peace can never be known with certainty: can the lingering spectre of Salem ever be fully exorcised?

> Only three mouthfuls of bread and water were given to the pressed Giles Corey in the two days it took to die



Salem witchcraft.

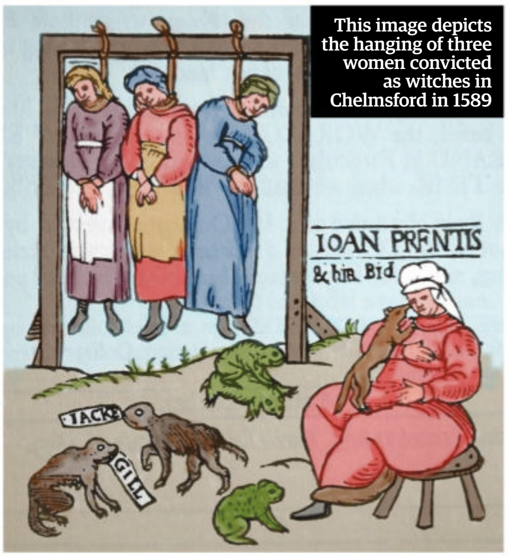
Hangings are treated casually in Salem in this depiction from *Pictorial History of the United States*, published 1845



An estimated 500 people were tried and executed for witchcraft in Britain between 1560 and 1717

Reason and Righteousness: Witchcraft's Legal History

The evolving perspective on witchcraft from both the church and the crown has shaped changing views on crime and punishment through the centuries



This image depicts the hanging of three women convicted as witches in Chelmsford in 1589

When Janet Horne was stripped naked, covered in tar, paraded through the streets of Dornoch, and burned at the stake in 1727, her grisly execution for practicing witchcraft marked the last such retribution against a supposedly guilty individual in the British Isles.

Horne was accused by neighbours of riding her daughter, born with deformities of the hands and feet, as a pony to her trysts with the Devil, who actually shod the daughter to facilitate future rides. Based on the evidence, such as it was, the sheriff passed sentence that both mother and daughter should die. The daughter managed to escape.

The legal grounds on which the Horne verdict was rendered apparently followed two centuries of parliamentary legal pronouncements and a papal bull dealing with the crime of witchcraft. Eventually, the perspective of the law evolved to a more benign interpretation of the practice and its malevolent intent. Across the years, witchcraft was interpreted as heresy because witches were in league with Satan, and the black arts were contrary to all that was holy.

Mysticism, attempts to explain or interpret natural phenomena, and the concept of the sorcerer, shaman, soothsayer, fortune teller, or witch are as old as mankind. The Bible contains numerous references to witches. The Ancient Egyptian *Book Of The Dead* is said to contain magic spells. Greek and Roman civilisation acknowledged the presence of witches as well. The enmity between the Christian Church and the practitioners of witchcraft began to rise during the Middle Ages and spread like wildfire across Europe during the late 1400s.

The catalyst for 200 years of zealous persecution of witches came in the form of the papal bull titled *Summis desiderantes affectibus*, or *Desiring with Supreme Ardor*, issued by Pope Innocent VIII on 5 December 1484. The bull came in response to a request from Dominican friar and inquisitor Heinrich Kramer and his associate Jacob Sprenger, also of the Dominican order. Pope Innocent VIII validated the authority of the friars to deal harshly with witches in Germany, asserting that they were responsible for the abortion of infants and crop failures while cavorting with demons and worshiping the Devil.

Subsequently, the friars co-authored the landmark book *Malleus Maleficarum* in 1486. It became the handbook for the relentless pursuit and destruction of witches, redefining the character of the witch from an individual without power before the authority of God to a threat to be eradicated. During the next four decades, *Malleus Maleficarum* was reprinted 13 times. Outbreaks of witch hysteria were commonplace in Europe and engendered action in England, Scotland, and Ireland.

During the reign of King Henry VIII, the Witchcraft Act of 1542 made witchcraft a crime punishable by execution. Witchcraft was described as a felony. In 1563, during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, a second Witchcraft Act specified that the death of another person as the result of witchcraft was a felony and deserving of capital punishment. In the same year, a Scottish witchcraft act made either practicing the art or seeking the counsel of a witch punishable by death.

> In a 1616 case, a 13-year-old child accused 15 women of conjuring demonic possession. At least nine were hanged

After King James I ascended the throne of England to become James I & VI, the Witchcraft Act of 1604, officially titled 'An Act Against Conjuration, Witchcraft And Dealing With Evil And Wicked Spirits', decreed that the act of witchcraft or association with "familiar" spirits was a capital offence. In 1649, amid a wave of acts intended to enforce godliness, the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland expanded its act of 1563 to make consulting with "Devils and familiar spirits" punishable by death. These acts were enforced at times without the "benefit of clergy," an arcane provision that allowed those convicted of witchcraft to escape burning hanging if they were able to read a passage from the Bible.

By the early 18th century, the Enlightenment had brought advances in science, medicine, technology, philosophy, and critical thinking. Its impact on the perception of witchcraft and its practitioners was profound in Britain. The Witchcraft Act of 1735 embodied a revisionist attitude that generally perceived the practice of witchcraft or a pact with the Devil as virtually impossible to prove. The act specified, however, that individual purveyors of such arts, those who promised to contact the dead on behalf of patrons, foretell the future, or pursue other such nebulous endeavours were guilty of vagrancy and were to be prosecuted as con artists. Prior acts were repealed throughout Britain.

The Witchcraft Act of 1735 was the law of the land in Britain for the next 216 years. The Fraudulent Mediums Act of 1951 forbade spiritualists, psychics, mediums, or witches from practicing their trade in exchange for money. In turn, the 1951 measure was repealed by the Consumer Protection from Unfair Trading Regulations 2008, enacted in May of that year.

Helen Duncan, a fraudulent medium, was the last individual imprisoned under the provisions of the Witchcraft Act of 1735

The Last Prisoner

Helen Duncan had exhibited some talent for psychic activity throughout her life, and by adulthood she had progressed to holding séances and attempting to contact the dead through a process of emitting ectoplasm from her mouth. Analysis once proved that this evidence of the supernatural was a concoction that included cheesecloth and egg whites. During one séance held in 1933, Duncan was arrested when the appearance of an apparition was revealed to be a hoax. Convicted of fraudulent mediumship, she was fined £10.

Although she had drawn the attention of the authorities on more than one occasion, real alarm was raised following a séance in Portsmouth in November 1941, when Great Britain was embroiled in World War II. During the proceedings, Duncan revealed that the battleship HMS Barham had been sunk, and one of its sailors who had perished supposedly materialised. Wartime sensors asserted that Barham's sinking remained classified and that only the families of the deceased had been notified. Naval personnel attended subsequent séances and gathered convincing evidence that Duncan was a fraud. She was arrested in 1944 and charged under Section 4 of the Witchcraft Act of 1735. Found guilty, she was sentenced to nine months in prison and released in 1945, the last person imprisoned under the 18th-century law.

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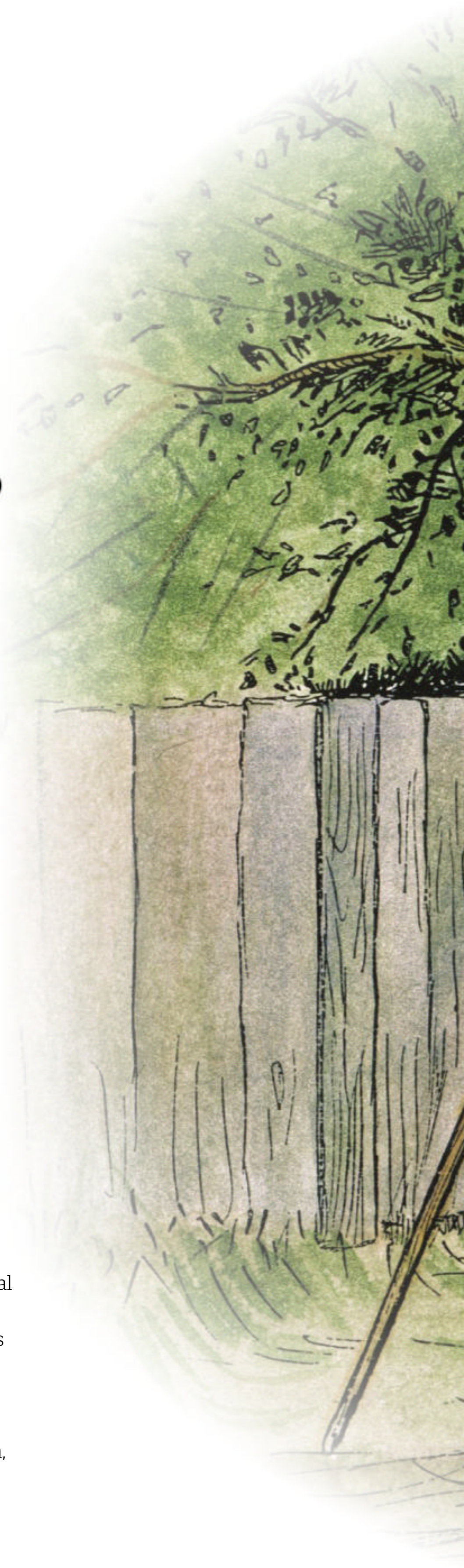
The End of Witchcraft

Like every fire, the persecution of witches across Europe finally burned itself out, but what was it that led to the end of the witch?

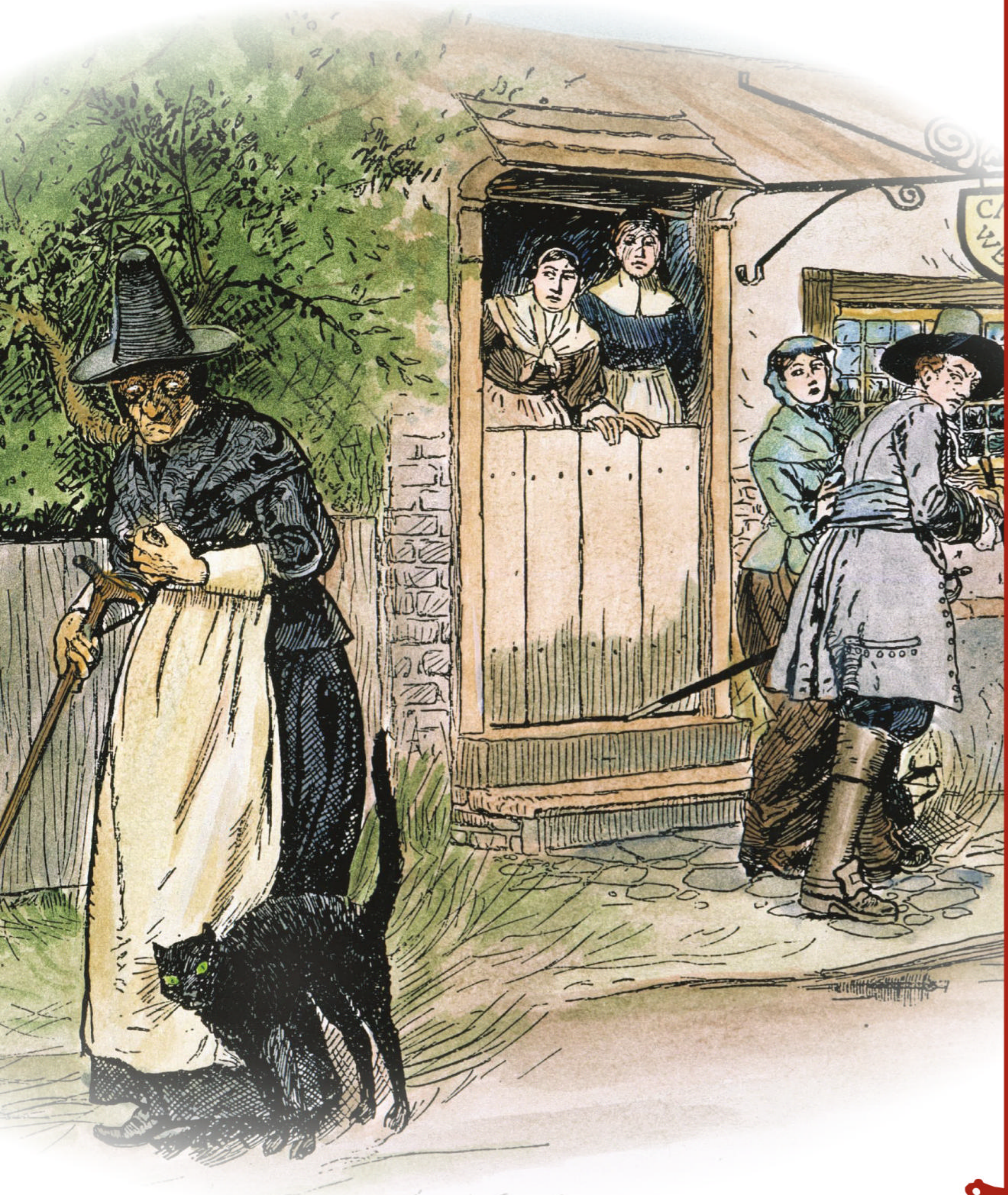

© Rex

Slowly but surely throughout the 17th century, the persecution and prosecution of witches in Europe slowed: declining steadily, prosecution rates reached little more than a trickle, before finally the practice of trying witches was stamped out altogether. Although this happened at differing rates across Europe, as a general rule by the second half of the century, witch trials had long since been on the wane. Exceptions stand out as being against the rule, such as the brief resurgence of witch trials in England during the Civil War period under Matthew Hopkins, the later execution of the Bideford Witches in 1682, and, further afield, the Salem trials in the last decade of the century. Such cases were remarkable due to their scarcity, as a combination of causes brought about the end of a period of persecution that saw an estimated 60,000 deaths.

In Poland, prosecutions for witchcraft continued in significant numbers right up until laws that decriminalised it

Despite, or perhaps because of, the fervour of persecution against witches, scepticism regarding the existence of witches and witchcraft had been present from the outset of the witch trial period in Europe. As early as the 16th century, a small yet vocal minority picked up their pens to counteract the calls for blood and panic: these learned writers expressed their disagreement in varying degrees of dismay, outrage and disquiet, sowing the seeds for the eventual discontinuation of prosecuting those accused of harming others by magical means.

Reginald Scot's *Discoverie Of Witchcraft*, was published in 1584 in the wake of the executions at St Osyth, which marked one of England's largest witch trials. The work was of significant influence, highlighting issues of proof and evidence when it came to establishing witchcraft had taken place, and the exposure of the irrational beliefs that led



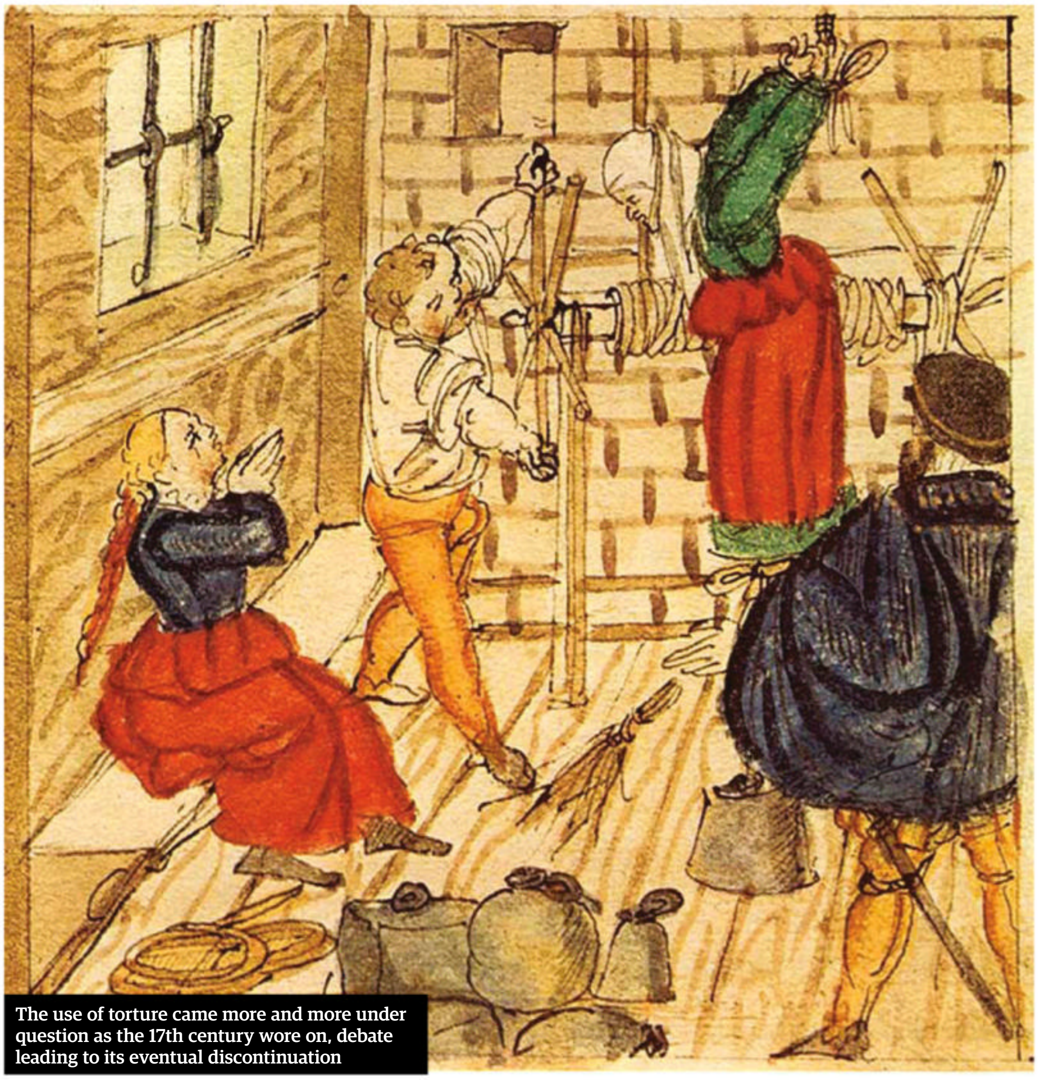
to accusations of witchcraft. For Scot, it was simply impossible that God would allow witches to have such power. Those who were accused were either innocent, victims of malicious accusation, deluded individuals who deserved pity not fear, or, if they really had inflicted harm, it was through more mundane means such as poison. If witchcraft didn't exist therefore, then it was not a crime that could be prosecuted. Johann Weyer likewise questioned the process in Europe and the validity of using torture to extract confessions. Could a suspect's words be trusted when uttered under such conditions? These and other questions were raised by those concerned at the witch-hunting frenzy.

Such views caused some disquiet and led to troubling calls of atheism where the existence of spirits was denied all together. Such contentious issues continued to vex commentators however, and as the decades moved on, the problem became glaringly clear: how could you prove that harm had been caused through supernatural means – and even if you could, how could you be certain you had caught the right witch?

It is of note that initially it was not necessarily a widespread disbelief in witches or witchcraft, but more the problem of proving it that led to the decline in trials across Europe. Proof was required, but this was hard to come by. It became rapidly apparent that new rules of evidence were needed, and as legal systems across Europe developed and evolved, the unsatisfactory nature of witchcraft-related evidence became glaringly clear. What might still count as proof for the undiscerning villager was no longer good enough for Europe's intellectual elite.

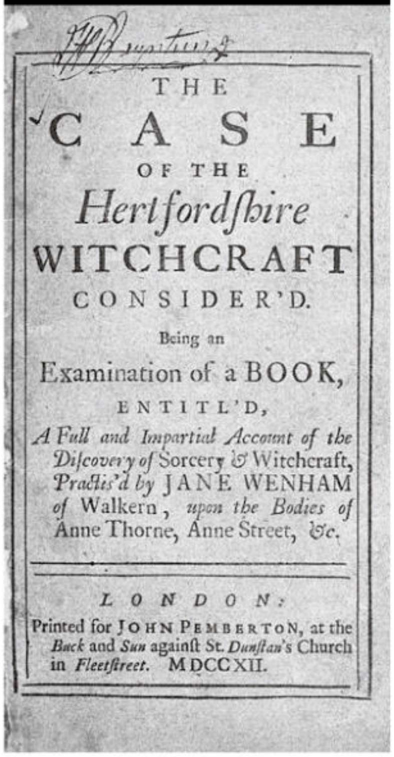
This was part and parcel of the general shift in philosophical and scientific thought that culminated in the European Enlightenment. By the end of the 17th century, such changes were apparent, with belief in natural laws rather than magical rules, a decline in belief in the efficacy of

> The 1736 Witchcraft Act in England was passed with only one person speaking against it



The use of torture came more and more under question as the 17th century wore on, debate leading to its eventual discontinuation

Accounts of the case provide insight into the continuing hold of witch beliefs into the 18th century



THE
CASE
OF THE
Hertfordſhire
WITCHCRAFT
CONSIDER'D.
Being an
Examination of a BOOK,
ENTITL'D,
A Full and Impartial Account of the
Diſcovery of Sorcery *&* Witchcraft,
Practis'd by JANE WENHAM
of Walkern, *upon the Bodies of*
Anne Thorne, Anne Street, *&c.*

LONDON:
Printed for JOHN PEMBERTON, at the
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The Last of the Witches

Often named as the last person convicted of witchcraft in England, elderly Jane Wenham of Walkern in Hertfordshire was one of the last to face trial and to be found guilty of the crime. Accused initially of bewitching a servant of Chapman's, 17-year-old Anne Thorn then came forward, unleashing a string of accusations against Wenham that saw the old woman become the talk of the area and beyond. Bearing the hallmarks and motifs of the earlier trials of the witch hunt era, Wenham was accused of causing fits, making the girl vomit pins, and tormenting Anne in the form of a cat. As matters grew out of hand, the old woman was derided and physically assaulted, with the situation in Walkern reaching fever pitch.

Opinion against Wenham was radically divided, illustrating both the deep-seated supernatural belief that still remained and the Enlightenment scepticism that sought to root it out. Wenham's case inspired a pamphlet war over her culpability and the wider issue of witchcraft, contributing to the passing of the 1736 Witchcraft Act a few years later.

Luckily for Wenham, Sir John Powell, the judge presiding over her trial was a sceptic, and the remark attributed to him that flying was not against the law highlights perfectly the new judicial rationality where the trying of witch suspects were concerned. Despite his recommendation of acquittal however, the jury found her guilty: reason finally won the day as an appeal was made and Wenham was freed, receiving a royal pardon.

prayer, and a general swing towards a more secular belief system sounding the final death knell for an already vanishing era.

The need for empirical evidence was strong across the board, and one area where witchcraft accusations in particular failed to deliver. The story of William Harvey dissecting a supposed witch's familiar to prove that it was the same as any other toad might be apocryphal, but the tale demonstrates tellingly the shift in attitude of learned thought across Europe. Once magic and witchcraft came under scrutiny and doubt was open and vociferously voiced, the entire system of belief and accusation began to crumble and then finally collapse. Earlier statutes, such as the 1604 Witchcraft Act, had aided the start of this in England, the inclusion of the continental ideas of a pact with the Devil and witches' marks into English witchcraft legislation requiring evidence that, it transpired, was actually incredibly hard – nigh on impossible – to come by.

In this new intellectual climate, Weyer's and other earlier objections to the use of torture also finally took firm root. This protest against the practice that was used – in both official and unofficial ways – gained momentum, the focus of a good portion of literature as the back and forth of debate and discussion brought the subject to the intellectual minds of Europe. It helped that commentators on both sides of the religious divide contributed to the debate, with Jesuits and Protestants alike denouncing the use of evidence obtained through dubious physical means. The eventual outcome was a reduction in the use of torture in witch trials, with the expected knock-on effect of fewer prosecutions and executions as time went on while works continued to circulate.

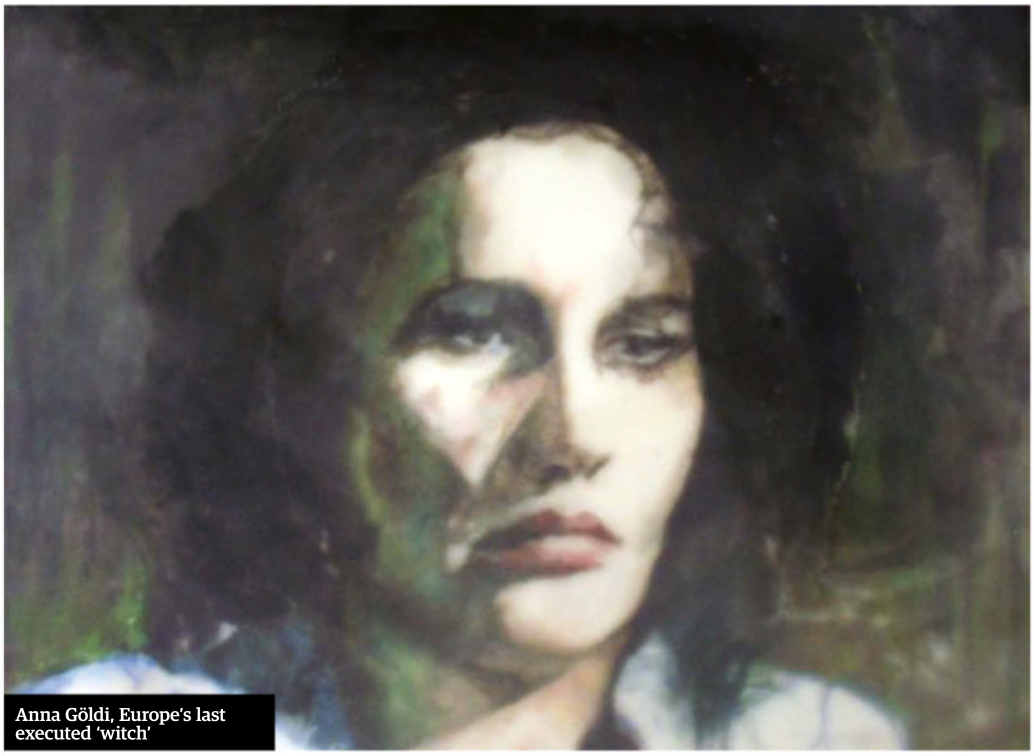
A general shift in religious thought also played a part in the increasing reluctance to persecute witches. Received opinion no longer accepted the scriptural order to root out witches: it was now believed that the 'witch' that should not be suffered to live was, in fact, referring to a diviner or poisoner. With this central tenet of the witch-hunter's manifesto on shaky ground, not only were issues of evidence paramount, but now the whole concept of witch hunting and trials was being firmly brought into question. Belief in the Devil and his powers likewise came under attack, God's nemesis and those who were said to work for him being demoted with the realisation that the Lord of Darkness could not, in fact, deliver. Where once the Devil had been all powerful, bestowing power on those with whom he had made a pact, he was now unmasked as an unfaithful trickster and charlatan, if he existed at all. Loss of faith in the ability to trust the word of the Devil, or those inspired by him, again helped pave the way for legislation that was to seal the fate of witchcraft prosecution.

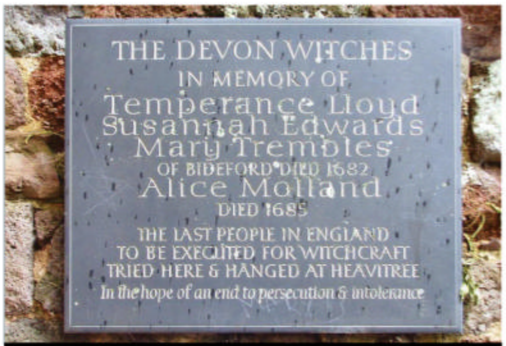
Anna Göldi was tortured into confessing to a pact with the Devil: despite retracting her words, she was executed

Social, economic and political issues also cannot be ruled out as having a part to play in the decline of witchcraft. Those areas where the most severe hunts had taken place were often those where centralised control had broken down or was ineffective; with both improving conditions and legislative and political reforms occurring, such instability was in the decline, with a decrease in prosecutions for witchcraft being one of the results. The unique set of conditions that have been cited as causing the hunts in the first place – such as poverty, inflation, high mortality rates, poor harvests, war and famine – were also on the decline as the century drew on, with some linking this shift and general improvement in living conditions and overall stability to the witnessed decline in persecution. Thus a combination of reason, science, politics, social and economic factors saw the end of one of Europe's most deadly and unhappy periods of history.

"A general shift in religious thought also played a part in the increasing reluctance to persecute witches"

Before the 17th century was out, the stamp of officialdom was placed on the matter of witches across Europe. In 1682, a Royal Edict in France,


Anna Göldi, Europe's last executed 'witch'


THE DEVON WITCHES
IN MEMORY OF
Temperance Lloyd
Susannah Edwards
Mary Trembles
OF BIDEFORD DIED 1682
Alice Molland
DIED 1685
THE LAST PEOPLE IN ENGLAND
TO BE EXECUTED FOR WITCHCRAFT
TRIED HERE & HANGED AT HEAVITREE
In the hope of an end to persecution & intolerance
The Bideford Witches are still waiting for justice: a petition for their pardon was unsuccessful

The difficulty proving the existence of witches' familiars and other 'evidence' led to the demise of witchcraft prosecutions

An Unbroken Tradition?

In an attempt to link modern day witchcraft practitioners with the persecuted of the past, anthropologist and folklorist Margaret Alice Murray put forward an exciting theory regarding the ancient pedigree of the 20th-century witch. According to her book, *The Witch Cult In Western Europe*, printed in 1921, the women and men persecuted throughout the witch trials period were, in fact, participating in an ancient fertility cult, the magic and rituals they carried out part of a long and revered tradition. After the times of persecution, the remaining witch community went underground, lying low to avoid further troubles. It never entirely died out, however, with members of the cult continuing to practice in secret before emerging, reborn, in the modern day guise of Wicca.

Unfortunately for Murray and eager proponents of her theory, there is little evidence to support this when the claim is put under scrutiny. Attempts to identify covens of 13 among the witch trials of the past fall apart on closer examination of the cases in question, as do most of her other central arguments such as the supposed worship of a horned god and the practice of ritual magic.

Murray's work in the history of witchcraft has been academically discredited

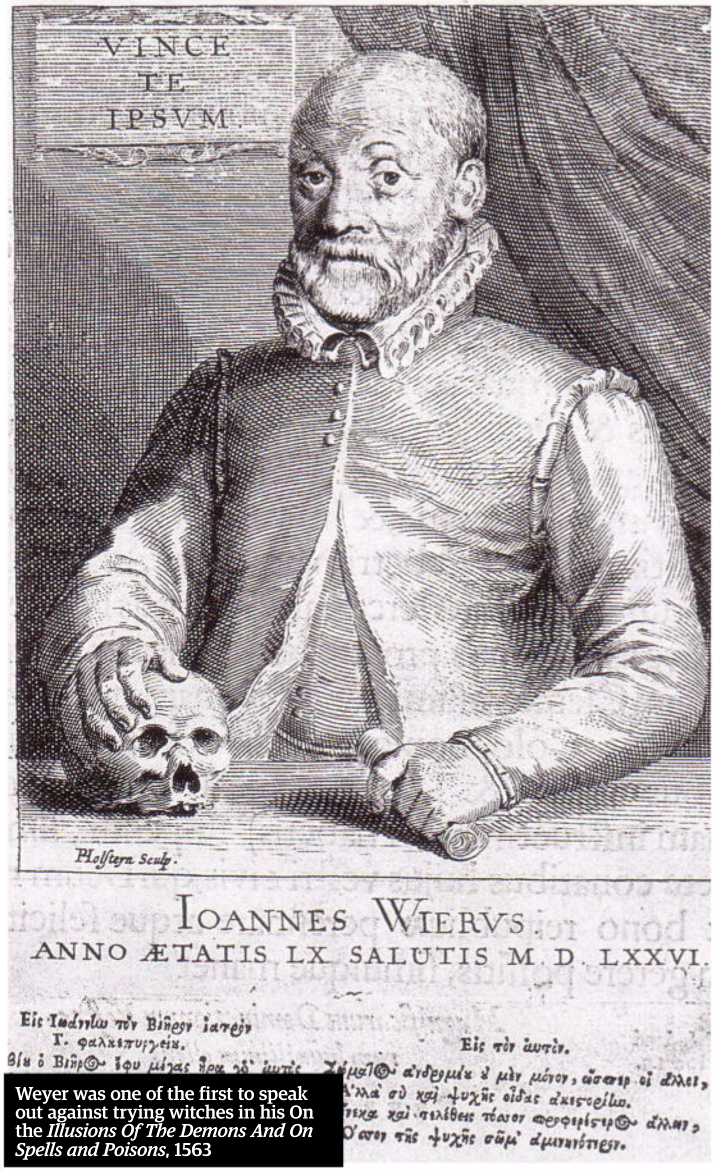
ostensibly at least, decriminalised witchcraft. Prussia followed suit in 1714, with Britain joining the countries to legislate against the trying of witches just over two decades later in 1736.

As the 18th century came around, the years that followed saw the steady and now inevitable move of other countries to join the move to decriminalise the witch: the Austrian Habsburg Empire passed legislation in 1766, Russia in 1770, and Poland in 1776. Sweden was one of the last central European countries where witchcraft was still a crime, with laws against prosecution only coming into place towards the end of the decade in 1779.

This seeming end to the prosecution of suspected witches, however, was not quite as straightforward as it might first appear. For a start, only the Polish and Swedish acts decriminalised witchcraft outright, wiping out the prosecution of witches entirely. Where the others were concerned, a closer examination reveals that telling qualifications in the statutes meant it was - theoretically - still possible to be prosecuted, and executed, as a witch. In France, one of the earliest countries to proclaim against witchcraft, the crime was actually only fully decriminalised over a century later in 1791. In Germany, Württemberg still saw trials occurring as late as 1805, and Spain was still prosecuting occasionally for certain magical practices until 1820. In England, witchcraft only fully left the statute books in the middle of the 20th century.

Also although the decriminalisation of witchcraft might have been accepted mostly without question higher up the social scale, amongst the population as a whole it was not such an easy matter to change thoughts and attitudes over might. Despite the passing of legislation across Europe, the ramifications of this were slower to trickle down than those at the top of the social order would have liked. In many areas, belief in witches and the power of the Devil remained strong, and many were still believed to be responsible for maleficium towards their neighbours, sometimes with disastrous consequences when a suspected witch was grievously assaulted by those who suspected them taking matters into their own hands.

Whispers of the old ways and fears continued, and throughout the 19th century and into the 20th, those that fit the old stereotyped view of a witch were still called by that name and blamed for mishaps and illnesses that occurred to their supposed victims. The West Country in England is one area where such occurrences were not uncommon. Although the 1736 Witchcraft Act now made the pretence of or belief in magical power the crime rather than carrying out maleficium itself, attacks and accusations were reported in the press with surprising regularity. Indeed, throughout the


VINCE TE IPSVM
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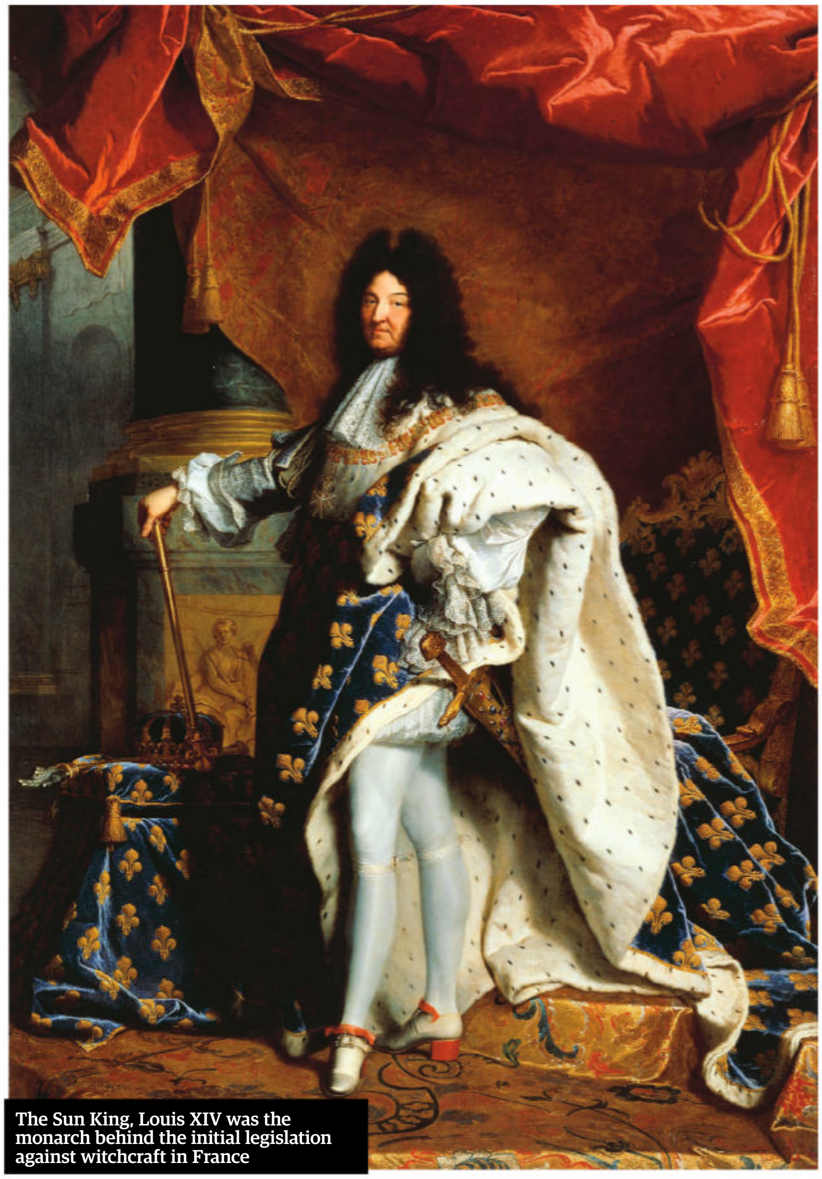
Weyer was one of the first to speak out against trying witches in his On the *Illusions Of The Demons And On Spells and Poisons*, 1563



The Sun King, Louis XIV was the monarch behind the initial legislation against witchcraft in France

century and a half that followed the passing of the act that was supposed to remove witchcraft from England, there were numerous incidences of a suspected witch being scratched or attacked, or counter magic employed to break their supposed hold over a victim. Often, when the 'witch' took refuge in her newly protected status and pressed charges, the attacker and their family and friends expressed great confusion and dismay that the courts were now no longer on their side. One such example was when, on two occasions within a ten year period, elderly Susannah Sellick from Devon took her accusers to court with complaints that she had been assaulted, in both instances the court judging in her favour with those who had attacked her being made to pay costs.

There was a call for the Bideford witches to be pardoned in 2013, but the petition was unsuccessful

In 1782, Anna Göldi from Glarus, Switzerland, became the last person to be legally executed for witchcraft in Europe. Working as a maid for the Tschudi family, she was accused of using supernatural powers to put needles into the food of one of the daughters of the household. Seeing justice that many executed victims have not, in 2007 Göldi was exonerated of the crimes that had been laid against her by the Swiss government, a move all-too infrequently made where the terrible miscarriages of justice during the witch trial period are concerned.

Medium Helen Duncan was the last person in England to be imprisoned under witchcraft legislation. Coming to the attention of the authorities when she was said to have foretold the sinking of the HMS Barham before it became official knowledge, the controversial and often maligned medium was convicted under the 1736 Act for pretending she could commune with the spirits of the dead and she served nine months in prison. It must also not be forgotten that in some corners of the world it is still possible to be murdered for being a suspected witch, a sobering fact that should bot be ignored in this supposed age of reason.

There is, however, a brighter side to be seen. After so long being the outsider, the figure of derision, feared, ugly and alone, the witch once more walks among us. Reborn and recast in a positive light now, modern-day Wicca and associated practices have been growing steadily in popularity over the last century, the witch community representing an identity that is positive, powerful and aware. With the darkness of the past behind us but not forgotten, the 21st century once again sees the time of the witch.

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